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THE HIGHLANDER

THE HIGHLANDER

By
Allan
PAUL CURTIS



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To
MABS

*without whose encouragement this
tale would never have been told*

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FOREWORD

SEVERAL years ago, I stood in an ancient Scottish Castle and held the sword of the great Montrose in my hands. That night, as I went to my chamber, I promised myself to write a story about him and the atmosphere of his time and place.

If, as I hope, this book pleases those who like a straightforward, lusty tale, I am satisfied. If my readers feel that it is far too gory in parts, I would have them believe that I write of the country as it was and not as the writers of historical romance usually paint the picture. The cruel savagery is not overdrawn for the year 1647; in fact, these conditions survived in the Highlands for a full century longer. The social system of the Highlands was feudal and actually some four centuries behind its times. It did not change until the land was finally subjected to English rule in the pacification of the Clans after the "Forty-five."

If my dealing with the conditions affronts the sensibilities of some staunch Caledonian, and if I have dealt hardly with some of the ancient names, let me advise him that I have been as honest in my

FOREWORD

treatment of those clansmen of the name I bear on the distaff side; that he loves Scotia no more than I do. Being so unfortunate as to be born beyond her shore, I, nevertheless, had the advantage of her education and I have spent the happiest days of my life absorbing the traditions of the very glens of which I write.

The name Sannoch is wholly fictitious, so far as I know; I once shot a stag in Glen Sannox far removed from the locale of my tale and liked its look and sound. So, also, are the characters, other than those of merely historic importance.

I might be criticised for making Dougal speak in the broad Scottish of the Lowlands. To the student it will be obvious that a Highland servant of that day would speak only in Gaelic, yet, I hope I will be excused in the effort to add colour to my tale.

The historical background is substantially correct to the smallest detail, in which I have leaned heavily upon John Buchan's "Montrose," the only reference book referred to.

PAUL CURTIS



CHAPTER I



The Coming of Ranald

I SAT before the blaze in the old hall toasting my benumbed shanks and idly watching the sparks flit up the chimneyplace. Ben, the great stag-hound, lay at my feet twitching restlessly in his sleep and the gaunt form of my henchman, Dougal, crouched upon a settle, cast ominous shadows upon the musty arras swaying on the walls, as he whetted the blade of a Lochaber axe and tested its edge with a horny thumb.

Without, the wind shrieked with fury about the tower and rattled the casements set high in the sturdy walls, while the snow swirled in great gusts and found entrance beneath the door. That day we had hunted a wolf far to the north under the shadows of Schiehallion and come home sodden to our meagre supper of porrich and beer.

“Sch-wit, sch-wit,” went Dougal’s stone with monotonous cadence, while I pondered dismally of all that had befallen me and mine in a few short months. And yet, as I look back upon it, my adventures really began that night during the

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great storm of the winter of 1644, when I had just come twenty years of age.

Matters had not gone well with the House of Sannoch. The avaricious and all-powerful Campbells of Argyll had steadily pushed westward onto our lands, so that we held but little which was rightly ours. We Sannochs were few in number and our powerful friends, the Stewarts of Atholl and the Stewarts of Appin were too far removed to render us much support against minor raids, although ready enough to call for our claymores when the Clans went out against the hated Argyll.

While to the south in the Glen of Balquhidder, everything was at sixes and sevens—a mixture of accursed Macgregors, a few staunch Maclarens and a smattering of other minor septs, all without unity to give them strength, so that the Campbells, like locusts of Egypt, forged north as well as westward.

Between raidings and the law courts, my father had suffered severely in his later years, so, having in my brother David a stalwart son to carry on in the field, he decided to send me to Edinburgh in my eighteenth year, where I studied musty law books in the chambers of Mr. Alexander Cameron, a friend who was the factor for our estates and those of many of the adjoining gentry.

My father had died in the year of 1643, sore

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hurt with the loss of my beloved mother and David had come into his own—such as it was. I cannot say that Mr. Cameron had found in me a very likely pupil; like most Highland youths of the time, my teaching had been principally from the horn book at my mother's knee, where I learned to read and tally accounts and a smattering of Latin and Greek which Father Shammus tried despairingly to din into my ears. I read the few books which we possessed and drank avidly of the war-like history of the past, both legendary and true, so that in the two years which I spent in "Auld Reekie" I had not progressed far, when I received the terse message from the North—"Your brother is dead! Come home!" which Dougal had sent to me.

Good Mr. Cameron provided me with a stout pony and twenty pounds Scot and in three days I was back at Sannoch, to learn that my poor brother's body had been found stark at the head of Glen Lyon with the corpse of his faithful gillie beside him. There was a great gash in the back of his head, as if he had been cleft from behind with a claymore and much blood about as witness to a staunch resistance when they were beset. His dirk, fowling piece and the contents of his sporran, together with an ancient Celtic brooch with which he fastened his tartan, were missing.

Our faithful retainers had scoured the country-

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side for miles around, but the body was already cold a day or more before the corbies wheeling overhead drew attention to it and the murderers were gone. To such a future I, little more than a boy, returned to be husbanded by old Dougal, who scarce let me out of the tower unless attended by nearby clansmen and himself. No wonder I gazed forlornly into the fire that terrible night and mused of the vengeance which it was mine to secure in honour of our house.

I looked at my father's great claymore suspended with his targe above the mantel, and breathed again a prayer that I might soon acquire the strength to wield it well and craftily.

Ben lifted his head with a low growl as the muffled thud of hoofs smote our ears and rushed to the door with a mighty roar.

"Hello within!" came a hail from without, followed by a thunderous beating upon the sturdy oak. Dougal looked at me questioningly, whilst the knocking continued.

Stepping to the door, axe in hand, he bellowed in return to know who was there "to disturb a body on sic a nicht?"

"'Tis Ranald Mackenzie," came the response, "and if you dinna' let me in, my blood be on your inhospitable heads, for I shall surely perish of the cold."

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Dougal looked through the peep.

"Hold the hound and stand by with your sword whilst I open," he said. "I can see but one against the snow, yet more be hidden mayhap. There's ane, a certain Captain Ranald Mackenzie, a kinsman of your mither, but he has been awa' to the lowlands for years. Mind now!"

With which he shot back the iron bolts, lifted the bar and stood back, Lochaber readily poised, as the door swung open from the force of the wind and our unexpected visitor entered with a gust of snow.

"God save us!" he said, with a railing laugh, as he unwound his great blue cloak and stamped the snow from his boots. "Your hospitality seems to be of a questionable variety, cousin."

"The times are bad for Sannoch," replied Dougal, setting fast the door. "We take no more chances here!"

"Well said!" answered our visitor. Striding towards the fire he flung his cape upon the settle and, putting his back to the blaze, turned to look searchingly at me, whilst I released the hound, no longer threatening. He was a tall, slender man of Highland type; alertness and vigilance were present in every self-assured gesture, yet withal, he looked not Scottish. The black hat trimmed with silver braid and edged with white feathers, cocked jaun-

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tily over his left eye, bespoke of France. The enormous, silver-buttoned cuffs of his black coat showed through a finely made leather jerkin of the same colour, as were the great jack boots upon his legs.

He bespoke the Continental officer, or so I rightly supposed, except for the butts of the ram's horn pistols tucked into his broad red sash and the hilt of the finely chased broadsword at his baldric, which were obviously Edinburgh made.

"You know me not, cousin," he said, "but I am your kinsman by your mother's eldest brother of Dingwall and have been adventuring in the Low Countries in the army of His Gracious Majesty, King Louis, since little more than your age, so the fault is scarcely yours. If I mistake not, this henchman is a Mackenzie—a clansman of my house and should bear me out, for I fished with him on the Beauly when he was a gawky gillie and I but a tyke. Do you mind the salmon you gaffed for me, Dougal, that pulled you into the big pool?"

"Aye," laughed Dougal, "I ken you weel the noo'; and weel I recall the staggie we tried to gralloch that jumped up and scared us most to deeth!"

"But come," interrupted our visitor, still master of the situation, "this is but poor fare you serve at Sannoch, unless you can offer a warm posset and

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a bit of food to the famished traveller that comes about your business."

Abashed, Dougal hurried off to the buttery, whilst I stood first on one foot and then the other, staring at our distinguished guest, who, drawing a stool to the fire, sat warming his hands at the welcome glow. I can recall Ranald under many conditions in later days, for he was ordained to shape my whole career from that night on, but never one in which he appeared more the hard-bitten, commanding soldier of fortune than on that first night at Sannoch.

Dougal soon returned with a meagre supper, my apologies for which Ranald waived aside and set to with a will. Meanwhile, an aroused gillie had stabled his nag and dumped his saddle bags on the floor.

"And now," said he, setting his steaming tankard on the board beside him and drawing a pipe from his bags, "a bowl of my rare Rapparee, whilst I tell you what brings me here.

"The news came to me that Montrose had taken the field, so I boarded a Dutch lugger which landed me at Inverness, where to my disgust, I found that half the Highlands were coyly hanging back with a finger in their mouths, waiting to see which way the wind would veer. Huntly and his Gordons marched bravely about, promising much, but giving

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nothing, and Kintail crouched in Ross waiting for the Frasers' move, contented that his claymores were sufficient to protect Mackenzie interests, come what might, without getting embroiled with either side. Much chagrined he was, when after offering my sword to the Marquis, I went off home and recruited a dozen or two of our stout Ronan men to prove that some Mackenzies at least, would fight for a good cause with little to gain but hard knocks and glory. But that's another tale.

"I was with the Marquis at Tippermuir where he cut Elcho to pieces and also at Aberdeen. Lumbering Argyll caught up with us at Fyvie—of this you have not heard. Despite his force of three to one, for by now we were reduced to but a thousand men, we stopped him there and forced him to retire with heavy losses. Montrose is following him cautiously; Nathaniel Gordon has gone to plea again for Huntly's aid, whilst Alasdair marched west to raise additional recruits among the Clan Donald. So, hearing of your brother's murder and knowing your plight, I asked leave to come here to enlist your aid, meagre as it may be, in a cause which may save your situation and mend my fortune in the doing.

"Tell me, cousin, are you a true Sannoch? Do you wish to play a man's part, regain your own and avenge your brother? Or do you list to stay here

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and be wet-nursed by Dougal, whilst great things go on about you?"

His aspersion nettled me and I replied hotly that I knew my duty, but that I knew not who had committed the crime, nor had I the strength to fight the whole of Argyll. Hence, needs must that I should bide my time.

To which he smiled depreciatingly and rankled me the more.

"'Tis well enough for you to talk," I blurted out, "who fight with an army of three thousand men or more, but what am I to do who could not count a full score of claymores as my own?"

At that his expression changed. "Laddie," he said, "I like you well. 'Twas but to test your spirit that I crossed you. Now, I know that you're a man with whom Ranald Mackenzie can well afford to play. But, look you, cousin, this is not the time to sit by and wait, whatever. I have a better plan and it is that which I have ridden here to propose.

"Montrose has swept all before him in the North; he is not the man to let Argyll rest. Scotland is not big enough for the twain. If he can defeat Elcho and Burleigh when outnumbered five to one, what think you he will do to Argyll, for all his Campbell men? Why, he'll sweep their country from Ben Cruachan to the Kyles of Bute!

"The Marquis thinks well of me; and I have his

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complete confidence. With due regards for political necessity in dealing with the clan chiefs, he leans upon me heavily and God knows he has needs for trained officers, who know the art of war and not merely the leading of a cattle foray!

"Come with me now; bring Dougal here and such men as you can and declare yourself for the cause—your own personal cause, made the stronger because it is the cause of Scotland; win or lose, it is your only path. If, in the end, Montrose should go down in defeat, you and all the petty lairds of hereabouts will be gobbled up by the Campbells, unless their power in the North is smashed first. The Atholl men have marched to meet him; the Stewarts of Appin, Clan Chattan, the Macdonalds and the Camerons are all with him. There lies your way to fame, vengeance and retribution. I come to you not as a recruiting sergeant, God knows, but for Scotland and your own!"

His eyes lit with the fire of an avenging angel as he spoke and the tallow dip bounced as on the last ringing sentence he pounded the board. Yet, reading the enthusiasm which his stirring appeal had made upon my Celtic temperament, his expression changed and with an understanding smile, he held up his hand to stop me before I spake.

"I see that you will," he said, "I doubt you'll change your mind; yet, now that I have lured you

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like a coquettish wench, I am chary of the consequences. Sleep on it, laddie, and give me your word on the morrow."

Well he knew that he had caught his fish—to play me was but flattery to his complete assurance—yet, flattering to me also, that he looked upon me as a man of sober judgment. Long into the night we huddled about the birch fire crackling on the hearth, whilst the storm howled about the tower, and Ranald primed us with stories of Montrose's first campaign and of his own experiences in the Lowlands and the army of Austria, where he had fought the Turks before the gates of Vienna.

We of Sannoch had heard but dim murmurs of the stirring days to the east of us, though the gallant Montrose had ridden by within a day's march of our sequestered glen on his way to Tippermuir, where with but twenty-seven hundred horse and foot, he had so disastrously defeated seven thousand of the Covenanters that it was said one could walk to Perth on Elcho's dead!

We listened with bated breath, whilst he told us how with the speed of a hawk, the Marquis swung north to Aberdeen and swooped on Lord Burleigh. How Alasdair's Irish Regulars coolly opened their ranks and let the Covenanter cavalry thunder through and turning, fired into their backs. How,

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quickly reforming when the Marquis called for a general advance, they charged Burleigh's centre with the Highland wings and drove the demoralised rabble into the gates of the city.

As I climbed to my chamber, I thought not of the rapine that followed in that unhappy city (the only blot on Montrose's escutcheon), but rather that a champion had come to deliver us from Campbell oppression.

CHAPTER II

Montrose

AWAKENED by a crash below, the unexpected promise of the night flashed across my eyes in a glittering panorama and I tumbled out to don my clothes. Hastily descending the narrow circular stairs, I encountered Dougal on a bench, a long bill-hook in his hands, busily engaged in fishing ancient bucklers and rusty breast-plates from off the walls.

“You knew I’d go!” I said, with a note of pride.

He turned quickly, “Aye, I knew. Dinna’ fash yeself, I have already sent for the men to come in.”

“You, of course, will stay and mind the tower,” I replied, with as straight a face as I could muster.

“Och!” he grinned. “Would you leave the hound at home when you hunt the wolf? What would ye be doing without the man that stood with his back to your father’s? Auld Angus will mind the place whatever, and though he canna’ stand the marching, a right guid mon he still would be with his foot planted in yon doorway. The point is, how

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many can we spare? There are the women and bairns to think on, not to speak of the cattle and Sannoch. Bide a wee till the Captain comes down, we shall need him for a' that." And off he went to the buttery with a stand of pikes to be burnished.

Ranald sauntered down betime, having roared for a kettle of hot water and someone to brush his broadcloth, as if he were in an Edinburgh inn. Having finished our breakfast, Dougal was invited to sit and discuss the plans for the momentous step we were taking. In all, we could muster three-and-twenty pikes and claymores, counting old Angus and several lads still too young for service, except in defense of the tower. Ranald was for taking the lot, saving the old men and the lads, arguing that they could hold the place and the women and children could come in on the first alarm.

But Dougal stood stoutly up to him—captain or no—and declared it could not be. "For," said he, "you dinna' ken our neighbours; the very fact that we had unduly weakened the Glen would be sufficient inducement for carrying off the last beast and a likely lass or two, before they burned every croft on Sannoch! No, there is Red Wallace and his brother, neither of them married and no better men with sword and buckler from here to Mull. There is the Maclean sept," counting on his fingers, "they can muster three—one with a fire-

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lock. There is tall Colin, the son of old Angus; yes, and his brother Davey and Rory Oig, he would give an arm to the cause to get aglee fra' that forked-tongued scold of his. That makes eight. That and no more can be spared."

Ranald argued and hectored, but Dougal was adamant. Scotland he would fight for anytime—who wouldn't? Particularly if it meant splitting a Campbell wizen and tousling one of their lassies, but Sannoch came first!

To avoid a rupture at the very start, I had to step into the breach and side with Dougal. Ranald was obviously put out that a Highland henchman upon whom he looked down should take precedence over him in a matter of military judgment, despite his silver lace. But it was two to one and he finally accepted our decision with as good grace as he could bring to his assistance and stalked from the room.

This breach gave me a clearer insight into my cousin's proud Highland spirit, which, had I but taken to heart, would have saved us a cruel misunderstanding, of which I shall say more later. Alas for Scotland! That indomitable pride of place and stiff-necked sense of position and unbending will which has served her so well in many a crisis, has as oft been her undoing.

The storm had ceased at daylight, so despite the fact that the hills were heavily blanketed in snow,

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some of the tenants were already in from the nearer crofts when our council of war broke up. Preparations for the expected entertainment were going forward. A sheep was spitted to roast on the open hearth and sundry pewter mugs and horns placed upon the board beside a cask of mountain spirits which they mixed with honey. As each newcomer arrived, he partook liberally of the powerful concoction and soon the hall was in a turmoil.

Finally, after much rough banter and some brawling, the sheep was declared done and each drawing his sgian dhu cut what he wanted. My cousin sat beside me at the head of the board with Dougal below him and a bowl of steaming punch before us. Eventually, upon a whispered admonishment from the latter to state the purpose of the gathering before matters had gone beyond their befuddled understanding, I arose to tell them why they had been called in.

It was my first address since they had celebrated my leadership. Encouraged by a sympathetic smile from Ranald, who had recovered his temper, I launched forth in much the terms which he had used the night before, recounting our wrongs at the hands of the Campbells and the suspicion of my brother's murderer. I then introduced Ranald, who told them of what went forward in the North.

My cousin's Gaelic was not of the best, for he

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had gone abroad over young and few of my clansmen spoke Lowland Scottish, let alone the less common English, but when he had done of our anticipated vengeance against the hereditary enemy, they were ready to cheer Beelzebub himself, had he entered the hall with a stench of brimstone on his tail. And the battle cry of Sannoch rang amongst the rafters, whilst old Angus seized his pipes and skirled a wild pibroch to the deeds of the Sannoch men.

The short winter's day drew to a close. Those who were still able, left for their homes, it having been agreed that all who were to follow me would cut across the hills to our rendezvous at Blair Atholl, where we hoped to intercept the van of Montrose on its way to Dundee; whilst Ranald and I, being mounted, would take a path down the Tummel on account of the heavy snow. Our easiest route would have been through Weem to the Tay Bridge, intercepting the army at Aberfeldy, but that entailed passing Castle Menzies where they were none too friendly to us. Knowing not which side of the fence they were on, Dougal cautioned against showing our hands until need be.

So, on the morning as the rooks were flying to the fields, we mounted and turning our horses' heads to the west, set forth. Dougal strode beside my stout Highland pony, his great axe over his shoulder,

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while the two poaching Wallaces brought up the rear with Rory Oig.

The path was rough and difficult to follow. It skirted the edge of bogs and wound its tortuous way along noisy mountain burns where we had to dismount and lead our horses and, what with the snow, we made slow progress. That night we slept in a shepherd hut, or tried to, where twixt lice and the smoke of the wet peat fire, we were driven nearly mad. But nothing could dampen my boyish ardour. Few as they were, for the first time I was leading the men of Sannoch!

The following day about noon we crossed the Tummel Bridge and learned that Argyll had passed south over the road to Dunkeld a week before. Turning north we headed for Blair Atholl, a few miles south of which we picked up the balance of our band, nor were we once challenged on the way, so lax was discipline in the Highland army. Soon, we came abreast of the camp of Alasdair's Irish and the Clan Ranald, where they had built rude brush huts upon the hillside, close to the town—a sure sign that they were not anticipating a quick move, for when on the march, the Highlanders slept in their plaids wherever they happened to be.

The main street of the little town was overcrowded with the men of Atholl, Camerons, Macleans, Macleods, Stewarts of Appin, and the un-

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kempt barbaric looking Ulster kernes of Colkitto's levies, dirty, half clad in their rags, with mops of hair hanging from their bare heads, the wildest looking creatures I had ever seen.

Ranald was instantly recognised and greeted from all sides and the Appin and Atholl men hailed us with a cheer as Colin marched bravely at our head, piping the "Sannoch Hills," by which I was embarrassed in view of our pitiful number, yet had not the heart to stop him. After all, I was young and could not quite subdue that feeling of the conquering hero as we passed by under the eyes of all. But, as we neared the manse, which was Montrose's headquarters, I could have cut off my right hand for not having done so. Before the door stood a parcel of inconsequential bonnet lairds, amongst whom I recognised Ian Mactavish, the master of a peel tower to the west of us, who always sat below a Sannoch—and knew it well. Yet, catching my eye, he turned to his companions with a sneering remark at our expense which brought forth a laugh, and turning disdainfully, disappeared in the crowd.

My cheeks burned in mortification and glancing furtively at Ranald, I met a smile which said plainly—"You have brought this on yourself, my lad!"

"Did you hear?" I asked.

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"I did," he replied shortly, dismounting from his horse.

"Well," I demanded, getting hotter every moment, "what was it?"

His eyebrows lifted slowly at my imperious tone and his gaze held mine for a moment before he made answer.

"He said, 'Now won't Argyll quake in his boots —the Sannoch men are here!'"

The mortification of it! Before I had set foot to ground! The clod-hopper! I flung myself from the saddle to follow him, but Ranald caught my arm.

"Softly, my cock, softly. We have other fish to fry; if you would cut your teeth before we face Argyll, best try less hardy quarry than Mactavish!"

"I can handle him!" I blurted, between mortification and rage.

"I doubt it," was the blunt rejoinder. "At least, so long as you carry a cleaver as cumbersome as the weapon at your side. Oh! I know it was good enough for your fathers, but the world moves on! If you wish to hold your own with such burly men as that in single encounter, first let me teach you to use a better weapon. Meanwhile, as a soldier you have more important duties to attend. Your men and horses must be quartered, after which we report and find shelter for ourselves."

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This was soon attended to and leaving me sitting on a bench in the inn to cool my spleen with a pot of ale, Ranald repaired to headquarters. Many came and went before my eyes, some few of whom I knew and by whose polite recognition my evil state of mind was quickly mollified. Amongst them was fine old Sir John Stewart of Appin, who greeted me with outstretched arms and drew me to him with the hug of a bear.

“Laddie,” he cried, “ ’tis proud I am to see your father’s son amongst us! ’Tis where he would have been, never fear—and would have you be.” Holding me off from him with a huge paw on each shoulder, he gazed at me. “And this is the wee bit laddie that loosed my young falcon and got whipped soundly for it—and now he’s the Laird of Sannoch. —Ah, well, time passes. Mind you must march with us, whatever. I’ll speak to the Marquis about it. ’Tis where yours have always been. We’ll meet again,” and with a nod, he hurried out.

I was again uplifted by a kindly word. We were to march with the Appin men, which meant in the van and to the right of the line! And as he had said it so all in the room could hear, I somehow knew he had heard the slighting remarks of Mac-tavish.

One hears much of the dour and inhospitable Scot by those who have never been north of the

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Forth and Clyde and it should be remembered of those Lowlanders that their characters were moulded 'twixt the upper and nether millstones of Highland and British oppression. One hears also of the effusiveness and generosity of the Latin, but if he would witness honest feeling, richly expressed, whether it be of affection or enmity, if he would know the joy of that kind of friendship which takes him in, gathering him to its bosom and says, "Take what you need" and means its all—then go to the Highlands.

It is probably this Celtic lack of restraint and spontaneous expression of feeling which has been the strongest bond between us and the French, rather than as many would have us believe, purely a political one.

The English can never understand this freedom of expression. It is too contrary to their nature and they are doubtful of its depth. But how true is any affection, except at the moment and how lasting can it be, unless, appreciating its worth, each party to it nurtures it as they would a fragile wild flower?

Shortly a gillie came in and asked for me, stating that I was to follow him to headquarters. A huge Macfarland stood before the door, claymore in hand, but recognising my guide, stepped aside for me to enter. At a long table in the back of the low-ceilinged room sat a distinguished-looking man with

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two secretaries busily writing beside him, whilst Ranald stood at one side, his French hat deferentially in hand and I knew that I was in the presence of the Marquis.

At the time, Montrose was in his thirty-second year. Of middle stature and gracefully built, his form was well set off in his Highland garb, the dark green tartan of the Grahams; his chestnut hair was worn cavalier fashion; his fine grey eyes were sharp and searching; he had a high-bridged nose, a large thin-lipped, determined mouth, somewhat effeminated by the too dainty moustache then in vogue and a clear ruddy complexion which denoted health and vigor.

As I entered, he rose to greet me, signifying to the secretaries that they could go on with their work and came around the table with outstretched hand.

“Sir,” he said in a level voice, “I welcome you with all my heart.”

I murmured my disappointment that I brought him so few, adding that at least they were well armed.

“Captain Mackenzie tells me that you have but half a score behind you, but if every laird in the Highlands had set aside petty differences in the common cause and done as much, we would now be over the Border to help his Majesty. Meanwhile,

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more men are gathering from the West under the suasion of Alasdair Macdonald and we hear that Argyll has sent his cavalry into winter quarters, so we but await Alasdair's return to push on after him to Dunkeld. He shall find that there are no winter quarters large enough to hold our Highland men!

"The Captain tells me that you and your clansmen know the country intimately from the Lyon to Glen Docart. This may be far more valuable than a hundred claymores, but time alone will decide. Thank God, they are well armed, for we are hard pushed on that score. Half of my force at Tippermuir were armed with clubs and scythes at the beginning of the fray and for lack of ammunition, we had to bid them arm with stones, of which fortunately there were plenty in the line of advance," and he smiled reminiscently.

"You will dine with me," he added, signifying that the introduction was at an end. "For the time I must ask you to excuse me; there is much correspondence requiring attention."

Such was my first sight of the great Montrose who was to free us of the Campbell menace before he paid the price on the block at Edinburgh.

As we strode down the street Ranald who was well pleased with my reception laughed and pinched my arm.

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“There is a leader for you!” he said with admiration. “As good as Adolphus at his best. He can fight! His strategy is perfect! He is politic and young and yet withal, he has that supreme virtue in a commander—he recognises facts. ‘Could not find winter quarters large enough to hold our Highland men!’ Quotha! Well he knows that as soon as the fighting is over with its chance for pillage, all Hell would not hold them. They would be off to the hills over night—disappear like the snow and in the spring he would have it to do all over again. I doubt not that you will see that unusual thing—a thing impossible with heavily accoutred troops—a winter campaign, my cousin, and have your belly full of Campbell flesh before the heather blooms again!”



CHAPTER III



Mactavish Shows His Hand

No sooner had we ensconced ourselves in Blair than I perceived another side of Ranald. On the march he had been the model of a seasoned campaigner in the enemy's country; riding his horse with an easy grace, he was constantly on the alert; each crag and bit of bracken was carefully scanned before we drew near and now and then he turned in the saddle to look back over the path.

His hitherto reserved pleasantries slipped from him like a mask. Keeping his own counsel, he hardly ever spoke and when he did, it was more often to give a terse command. Under cover of a screen of firs he watched the approach to the Tummel Bridge for an hour before we ventured to cross and once headed north, he pushed over the road to the limit of the men's endurance.

I could not but admire his soldierly bearing the more and as we went about the town, I noticed with pride his popularity with the men and the

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respect with which his equals greeted him everywhere.

To have him therefore quickly change for the worse under the idling influences of a soldier in camp was a great disappointment. Despite his fine feathers and grand Continental air which I had so much admired at Sannoch, I was soon to see the coarser side of the typical soldier of fortune who lived by his wits as well as his courage. He lolled about the tavern drinking and dicing with the wilder of the officers who were looked upon askance by our Highland gentry. True, he did it with a superior air which his companions swallowed, but it shamed me to see him in such company. Often the stakes were high and frequently he did not come in till the night was well gone, but no matter how drunken and riotous his companions might become, he never seemed to show it.

Once as I returned unexpectedly to our quarters, a slattern serving-wench rolled off his pallet with a screech of alarm and ran tittering down the passage. Too ashamed to look at him I turned on my heel, followed by the raucous laughter of the no-ways abashed Ranald.

Eventually, after losing heavily, he asked me for a loan which I perforce made him. God knows I am not niggardly and would willingly have given him all I had in a better cause, but our Highland

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pounds were few and it galled me, knowing that it too would go across the table wastefully and might be sorely needed for my men.

Sensing my attitude, he accepted it with a condescending hauteur and for a day or two I saw little of him, but I was certain that he had lost again for he moped about until he summoned the courage to come with a hang-dog look and importune me, promising payment anon.

Counting the contents of my sporran, I gave him three pounds sterling which was a deal to us and left but an odd ten to see us through the winter, telling him that it must be the last for the purpose to which I knew it would go.

His eyes flashed and for a moment I thought that he would refuse the money and come to an open breach with me, but he pocketed it and his pride and flung himself from the room without a word.

All day I worried over the situation I had created. That Ranald had become seriously fond of me I felt reasonably sure and certainly he had shown me a way out of my evil situation. That in face of this I should place myself in the unenviable position of appearing niggardly was insufferable. So having supped with Dougal, I took myself to the tavern where I was sure to find him, in the hopes of sharing a bottle and making amends.

The place was thick with smoke and making

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my way to the table around which a crowd was gathered, I wormed myself unseen to a place behind Ranald's chair. Across the board sat Mactavish, his face flushed with wine and success and between the two were several players of his ilk. I sensed the play was high from the hushed interest of the on-lookers and the pile of coins beside Mactavish showed his luck was in with a vengeance. One by one, the other players withdrew from the game, leaving Ranald to oppose him.

Three casts he made and lost. There were but five crowns beside his cup when Mactavish took the dice and rolled three sixes and his hand stretched greedily to take the stakes.

"Your last cast, I take it," said Mactavish, with a leering look of triumph.

Ranald made to rise, when with my hand upon his shoulder, I pressed him to his seat, at the same time passing him my all—the ten pounds in gold. He looked up in surprise and his face lit with an understanding smile as his eyes met mine. Something passed between us which meant much—the knowledge that, come what may, we two would stick together like lichens on a rock.

Mactavish scowled. "Hoot!" he cried. "The laird of Sannoch is amongst us. Will you no have a cast?"

"I do not play," I answered coolly.

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“He does not play!” he mimicked. “Perhaps it’s the company you do not care for?” as if to challenge me.

“Have done your chatter!” interposed Ranald tersely. “One cast for the lot against yours, Mactavish!”

I believe that Mactavish would have refrained, being satisfied with his victory, if it were not for the chance of taking me too. The stake was a huge one for the Highlands and all present stood with abated breath. Coolly Ranald reached for the dice and my heart sank as he rolled a total of but thirteen. Already I saw our little fortune swept into the sporran of the hated Mactavish.

Laughing, he seized the cup and with a flourish cast. A dice spun across the table and rattled to the floor, the other two lay plain to be seen—a five and a four.

“Mind it!” cried Mactavish. “What’s the count?”

“No matter,” answered Ranald. “You will roll upon the table.” With an oath, Mactavish took the dice and cast again for a twelve and Ranald swept up the stakes between them.

“You will roll again for the same?” said Mactavish, now thoroughly aroused.

“No!”

“Double or quit?” he leered, leaning nearer.

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"No," answered Ranald. "I play no more with you now, or at any time."

"So," sneered Mactavish, "that's how the wind blows. You can play if Sannoch bids you, but you canna' if he says no!"

"Listen, Mactavish," came the calm retort, and knowing Ranald, I marvelled that he could so contain himself, "don't cross me. If you would pick quarrels stick to your kind."

"What!" roared Mactavish, whipping himself into a fury. "Do you think I 'm afeared of you or any other Mackenzie from Cromartie to Kintail?" And he stood over Ranald, who coolly got to his feet.

"Yes," he said. "I think perhaps you are. But I don't have to fight you. Those here know my reputation. No one can call me coward to refuse to carve my crest upon your hide when there is better use for our swords—even yours."

"Come," he said, addressing me, "let us go." And turning on his heel he left the inn with me, followed by a derisive laugh with which Mactavish sought to cover the fact that his power of decision was not equal to the occasion.

We shared a garret, the best which the town could afford late-comers. A couple of rickety stools and a lanthorn comprised its furnishings. We slept upon a rude straw pallet, over which we spread

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our plaids. It was draughty and damp, for there was no place for a fire and the rats scuttled about in the dark, but Ranald, the seasoned campaigner, recked not of simple hardships, whilst I was abroad from dawn to dusk absorbing the simple drill in which the Highland Foot was instructed.

This consisted of little but charging in close formation, three deep, at imaginary foes, wheeling quickly to change front and out-manœuvre the enemy or protect the flank and the new method of opening the ranks to let the opposing cavalry through without shock, firing into their rear and quickly reforming.

The Highland army had need for little else; it had no artillery and few firearms except pistols which they fired at close quarters, then threw them at their enemies' heads and pushed the charge home with claymores. Their strength was in their mobility, speed, and the force with which they drove their wild charges into the enemies' ranks. There was nothing more terrible to confront—even cavalry was powerless against it. The finest infantry in the world has cracked when a horde of screaming, half-naked Highlanders bore down on them like a thunderbolt, claymores flashing, roaring their battle cries and sweeping aside bayonets which they caught upon their targes like so much chaff.

True to his promise, Ranald had taken seriously

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my instruction with the sword, substituting a lighter blade for my ponderous broadsword; he made me discard the targe and taught me to extend my guard in prolongation of the forearm, thereby using the far more deadly point, almost to the exclusion of the edge. This was quite contrary to Highland practise, in which the targe worn upon the left arm was an important source of defense.

I was quick on my feet and had been well schooled by Dougal in the traditional method of sword and buckler fighting, as it is commonly called, in which foot-work counts for so much. But when at sword play with Ranald, I soon realised the superiority of his Italianated style for individual combat, no matter how effective our method was in the mêlée. Strive as I might, it was impossible to reach him over that elusive point which was ever before my eyes.

Standing easily erect, a maddeningly derisive smile upon his face, he would taunt and goad me on to renewed efforts long after I was ready to drop from circling and slashing at the solid wall presented by his point.

The morning after our altercation with Mactavish, as we rested from our efforts in the back of a stable where we were wont to practise because of the smoothness of the ground, he asked me sud-

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denly what cause I had to incur the enmity of the man.

I answered, none; that it could be but petty jealousy.

Ranald shook his head—"There's more behind it than that. Why should he feel the superiority of the Sannoch's of which you prate? He has thrice your claymores and friends as powerful."

"Well," I answered, "all I can say is that 'tis a mutual feeling; everytime I set eyes upon him, the gorge rises in me. I loathe his sneering air of superiority."

"We all make mistakes, laddie," replied Ranald. "Nay, I seek not to open the sore of your mortification," laying a restraining hand upon my knee. "Admitting that you did cock your bonnet over much at our coming—and God knows that I like you the better for it—but be on your guard. Word has come to my ear of several threats the man has loudly made when in his cups; he means mischief. Today as we fenced I saw a face spying on us from yonder loft; 'twas in the shadow and yet, I would swear it was one of his henchmen. Twice of late returning from my carousals, I have seen a figure skulking near our lodging. In the daytime you are safe, but at night stir not abroad unless accompanied by Dougal or me."

"I shall seek him out and demand an explana-

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tion," I declared hotly. "Why let the thing go on? Let's drive him into the open!"

"Exactly," sneered Ranald, "and be laughed at for your pains! What have you got to go on? What tangible thing? Expose your hand without knowing his cards—God knows you need a guide! I'll not have it, you understand. For what do you think I am training you? Bide your time. When I am through with you, you can call him out and slit his gullet any day you list, but till I give the word, and that day is not yet, you have much to learn. Be crafty, and we may discover much. Actually I do not fear his mischief whilst we are here. If he touched you after last night, the finger of suspicion would point directly at him, but when we march—beware! Meanwhile I'll make a pact with you—fence hard, learn your sword and bide your time and I in turn will promise to mend my ways—at least till the campaign is over!"

"'Tis a bargain!" I cried joyfully. "And there's my hand upon it!"

So we made our pact against Mactavish and in acknowledging a mutual enemy, drew closer together.

At long last, the awaited Alasdair arrived from out of the mist of the Western Isles. We heard the shrill skirling of his pipes afar off and went to meet him. Alasdair had done his work well. Five hun-

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dred oppressed Macdonalds of Glengarry, Clanranald, Keppoch and the Isles had rallied to his standard on the promise of a final accounting with the Campbells. There were also Macleans from distant Mull, Farquharsons from Braemar, more Stewarts from Appin, and the Camerons of Lochaber burning for revenge.

That night a feast was held in honour of the newcomers to which all the chiefs and smaller lairds of the existing army were invited. Each in his bravest array, cairngorms, polished silver and steel flashed and scintillated against the varied tartans of the gathered host—the rich green and purple of the Grahams, the vivid red and yellow of the Macdonalds and the red and blue of the Stewarts. John of Moidart was there; the Captain of Clanranald, Donald Glass of Keppoch, young and gallant Aeneas of Glengarry, Magnus O'Cahan who led the wild Irish at Fyvie, and Nathaniel Gordon. Splendid old Lord Airlie came in on the arm of Ogilvy, who was followed by his sons, Sir Thomas and Sir David of that name.

Never have I seen our leader, the gallant Montrose, more fascinating than he was that night—a glittering figure in his full Highland regalia. Released from his usual reserve, he toasted one and all of the newcomers, not forgetting the least amongst them and then turning to Alasdair, he

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publicly thanked him in such glowing terms of compliment to his past services and confidence in the future that he brought the company cheering to their feet.

In response Alasdair arose and silence reigned expectantly. A great rugged man was he, typical of his own granite crags. Given to much drunkenness and wild living, he was as at home in a staff council as a bull in a cupboard, but give him a charge to lead and he could be counted upon to accomplish what to others would be impossible. In no sense a strategist, he knew only to drive straight home, get to close quarters and have it done in the shortest possible time and no man in the Highland army was followed more willingly. At his bidding the veriest craven would hammer his way through the gates of Hell.

"My lord and gentlemen," he said, "I cannot thank you; my words are in my strong right arm and those of the men that follow me; I can give you no eloquence, but I will give you deeds. Yet I would advise, although my advice is more oft laughed at, 'tis this— Here is no time to sit in idle chatter. Now that we have the force to meet him, we learn that Argyll has sent his horse to winter quarters and taken himself by post to Edinburgh, resigning his commission to the Covenant. Well, 'tis no' their loss, I ken. But we cannot sit and

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wait until they find someone more worthy of our steel. I speak frankly, milord, these gentlemen who have willingly adventured with me here in the King's quarrel look for help from the King's Lieutenant in their own. Nor could their force be held intact throughout a long winter without a chance of fighting and booty; it never has been done, and we all know that it cannot now. Let us seek Argyll in his lair and smoke him from it whilst we have the time!"

Again they were on their feet cheering until the rafters rang, whilst the King's Lieutenant smiled grimly as he looked with satisfaction upon the eager faces of the now thoroughly aroused warriors about him.

Ranald leaned to me. "Said I not so?" he whispered. "We will march soon—God help us. I will warrant Alasdair was primed to wave that banner before their eyes!"

Again, the room was hushed as Montrose replied and his voice rang sharp as a clarion.

"My lords and gentlemen, you have voiced your wish; you howl like the wolf pack for Campbell flesh. Well, you shall have it. Never before have the Western Highlands been so united in a common cause. Justice is long overdue you and I promise you that the interest shall be paid in full. The Clan Campbell ceases to exist as a great power; we shall

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carry the sword and the torch through Argyllshire from north to south!

“Meanwhile, I commend you to your beds. The army council will accompany me to my quarters to discuss the ways and means—the army marches at dawn!”

Such was the King’s Lieutenant in Scotland, the Marquis of Montrose. To make a decision was to act, an expedience to which the lightly equipped Highland army, living virtually off the country, was admirably suited.

Searching out Dougal to give him the news, I returned to our garret and was hardly asleep before I was rudely awakened by him, bidding me dress hastily as I was urgently wanted at Headquarters. Amazed at such a summons, I made all haste to don my kilt while Dougal, like a mother, painstakingly picked straw from off my jacket.

There were a dozen or more in the room when I entered. Lord Airlie snored on a bench in a corner, while Keppoch and Gordon argued a point before a huddle of drowsy listeners. I knew not the time of night, but they had evidently been long in session and I sensed from the isolated factions arguing on different points, that it was near the close. As I entered the room, the Marquis motioned me to come to him and the buzz ceased.

“You have been commended to me for an im-

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portant service, Laird of Sannoch. I tell you frankly that older men have been suggested," glancing at Macgregor, who stood scowling beside him, "but you are favoured by certain staunch friends upon my staff. The situation is this. The Lowland road is impossible, for it exposes our flank to any force which the Covenant can hastily bring against us. The easy way is through your friendly country, due west to Rannoch and through the Pass of Brander, but if the Campbells get wind of our advance before we win through, a handful could hold it against all we could bring to bear. Mid-way through Breadalbane seems the only way. Captain Mackenzie tells us that your Sannoch men know every rock and heather bush in its wild glens and that you yourself have hunted over much of it since a boy. In this, he is backed by Sir John Stewart who says that his Appin men, who lead the van, will be well satisfied to follow you. What say you? I put the responsibility straight to you. Think you that you are equal to it?"

"My lord," I replied, "I speak not for myself, but rather for the men I lead. Among them are some that have been on many a raid into Campbell country with my father before I was out of swaddling clothes. I opine that no man knows the way which you would take, or could lead through it more quickly than Rory Oig and Angus MacAlain Dubh, who though old, is still stout of both heart

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and limb. Him we can pick up at Sannoch on the way. What value I personally may have lies in the fact that they will expect to be led by one of my name, but before you decide or ask me to accept this post of honour and the responsibility to the cause, I should know who the other aspirant is, so that I may honestly say if in my heart I feel that he can offer more."

"Well!" exclaimed Sir John, "what say you, milord? Is it not a fair request?"

Montrose pondered for a moment. "Aye, the lad rings true to me. The other candidate is Ian Mactavish."

"Then, milord," I answered readily, "I crave you give me this post and I promise you that your van will be through the pass before the enemy is aware, for I am certain that we know a path unknown to Mactavish or any of his. To our sorrow, we of Sannoch have found our neighbour loath to adventure into the Campbell country with us beyond the march of Breadalbane."

"So be it!" said the Marquis, waving aside a whispered remonstrance from Macgregor. "You will attach yourself to the force of Sir John Stewart who is your supporter in this and be prepared to take the road by daylight."

Thanking him for his confidence, I saluted and withdrew as the Council was breaking up.

So on the morrow, the eleventh of December,

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the Highland force three thousand strong, moved out of Blair and facing west, started on that terrible march which will be remembered as long as military history is discussed by man. The force was divided into three columns. John of Moidart, the Captain of Clanranald, led the men of the West —Camerons, Macleans, Stewarts and Macdonalds, with the men of Appin under Sir John in front. Alasdair led the Ulster men, divided into three regiments under Magnus O'Čahan, Ranald Og Macdonald and James of the same name. Whilst Montrose led personally the third column consisting of the few Gordons who were with us, the Atholl men and the Lowland Contingent, including most of our horse under Ogilvy.

Immediately the council of war had broken up, Ranald had been dispatched with a troop of horse along the road to Dunkeld to prevent any messengers being sent to southward to inform the Covenant of our direction, having been instructed to hold the Tay Bridge at Aberfeldy and stop all traffic until we arrived.

Passing through Aberfeldy to Weem, we seized the laird, which was no loss to Sannoch, and put the fear of the Lord in the hearts of the Menzies who were astraddle the stream, not knowing which way to jump and proceeded up Glen Lyon.

The premature snows, harbingers of worse to

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come, had disappeared from all but the high tops. A piercing wind blowing from out of the north but added zest to our adventure and the weather, as predicted by a soothsayer, remained brisk and clear. We slept three together in the heather beside mountain burns, the better to augment the warmth of our plaids, for the nights were sharp with frost and in the morning arose to find the distant mountains shining forth like jewels, unencumbered by the usual mists of the Highlands.

It was not, in fact, the weather which we feared would impede our progress, but rather the low wet lands. Incessant rains had reduced the bogs to morasses; the streams were in spate and the short winter days but nine hours long. Some places were well-nigh impassable to any but the lightly equipped Highland army. We had no artillery; our mounted contingent under Ogilvy was less than a hundred strong and our baggage meagre, for we lived like a horde of locusts off the country leaving desolation in our train.

Even so, the suffering of the women and children following the Ulster men—always encumbered by a rabble of camp followers—was pitiful to see. In the tail of the army they were strewn out for miles. Poor, bedraggled wretches, barely human in appearance, who like faithful dogs had followed their men from Ireland and accompanied them over

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the Highlands from Alasdair's landing south of Kintail through the first campaign of Tippemuir, Aberdeen and Fyvie and were to go down beneath the Covenant swords in the welter of blood after Philiphaugh. There was no place for the weak; those who could, staggered on, the derelicts to fall by the wayside in the wake of our indomitable march, their only requiem from the ravens which wheeled and croaked overhead like the promise of doom.

As compared with the rest of the Western Highlands, Argyllshire was a land of milk and honey. The cattle were fat and plenty; the broad straths grew luxuriant crops; religious intolerance was almost unknown; it had direct commerce by its own ships with the ports of the Continent and every hamlet had its school teacher. As a clan, the Campbells stood alone, second only in strength to the Gordons and the isolated Mackenzies. They could put more claymores in the field than any other clan and for centuries they had the knack of winning by the sword and holding by writ that which they took from their oppressed neighbours. Furthermore, they felt with reason safe from the retaliation of their unorganized victims, always at peace with the Lowlands they had nothing to fear from the south. Mull was too weak to be a menace from the west; north and east they held sway over

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the lands of Breadalbane to the head of Loch Tay. Little wonder they felt safe in their splendid isolation. But the day of reckoning was, all unbeknownst to them, at hand.

Skirting the wet lowlands bordering Loch Tay, we swept on into the wild hills above Glen Docart; Rory Oig had been sent on to the tower with a message, bidding the balance of the men under old Angus join me now that all danger was in front.

It was after attending a last council at Glen Lyon House, that I encountered Mactavish. Seeing Ranald and me approaching, he drew rein and sat his horse, awaiting us with a handful of his men behind him.

“And a little child shall lead them!” he said, with an evil sneer upon his countenance.

All my pent up feeling burst restraint at this fresh insult. “Curse you, Mactavish,” I cried. “I’ll take no more from you!”

“He’ll take no more of it,” he scoffed. “And what will he do?”

“Settle it now,” I said, half drawing, when Ranald seized my arm.

“No!” he said. “You’ll not!”

“And for why, Mister Busybody?” sneered Mactavish, looking at Ranald. “It’s little to see where his courage comes from when he has his wet-nurse ever present to prevent his getting hurt. He does

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not like my words and I will not change them, so if he would fight, it's up to him. There's plenty of room and the light is fair!"

To my own credit I say that at the moment I would have fought him had he been twice the man he was, but Ranald still restrained me.

"Look you, Mactavish," he said and his words came slowly and like ice. "If the lad does not kill you when the campaign is done, I surely will. I promise you that, if I have to follow you to John o' Groats to do it. But you will bide our time. He cannot in honour fight you now, and well you know it, because he has been picked for work which you, Mactavish, and your rabble, were not fit."

That struck home and if ever looks could kill, Ranald had been a dead man then.

"Aye," he added, following it up, "well you know if you and your rag-tags ever dared to see as deep into Campbell country as Sannoch's have —to their honour—you would lead the van. We'll meet, never fear, but we will do Montrose's work first—and you were a traitor to suggest aught else!"

The score of men of Sannoch took the lead. Straight through the centre of Breadalbane we forged, along the old raiding road which in more powerful days, my fathers had taken into the lands of the Campbells, who flattered themselves that

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no one knew the way and if so, were too few to dare its wild corries and dark and fearsome glens. But they had forgotten the few indomitable spirits which still clung to the crofts and pastures around that ancient tower which had been our strength.

One evening as we stopped on the brae of Glen Docart beside a tiny mountain tarn, I lay in the heather whilst my men prepared our meal of cold venison and watered oatmeal, with a portion of spirits to help it down. Peace reigned over the landscape; the dun of the withered heather blending into the lush green of the bogs like the design of a tapestry, whilst the distant peaks glint with the roseate hue of the setting sun. Languidly I stretched my weary limbs, when suddenly a shot shattered the quiet and a slug flattened on a granite boulder beside my head.

A man with a firelock dashed from his concealment in the bracken above us with the speed of a deer and Dougal and Angus took after him with maledictions as to his fate. Long after dark they came in crestfallen with failure, having lost their quarry in the gathering dusk. Dougal was confident that the would-be murderer was not a Campbell man. Again we felt the sinister shadow of an evil hovering to swoop.

CHAPTER IV

The Raid

IN our wake swept the relentless force of the Western men under the fierce Moidart. Quickly we pounced upon the lonely out-lying crofts and gobbled them up before they had a suspicion of our coming. Not a fire was lighted as we lay shivering in our plaids at night. Soon we were deep in Argyllshire, beyond the ken of my Sannochs. At dawn one morning we gazed down from a high place upon Crianlarich, still peacefully slumbering in the valley. Out of the morning mist we surged down the slopes in a wide arc. Suddenly a shepherd dog barked. Someone shouted from the town and with a rush and a wild Highland yell, we were in the streets. Women ran screaming; men cursed and cattle bawled with terror from the byres.

Dougal was by my side when a red-headed virago screeching curses from an open window hurled a heavy pot. The missile struck my shoulder with a sickening thud and felled me like an ox and be-

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fore I could stop him a Maclean threw up his snap-haunce and fired. She fell across the sill, her arms and red hair dangling in the morning breeze, whilst a scarlet trickle ran down the face of the wall and spattered in the kennels.

Meanwhile, Dougal swung his great axe upon the door and a dozen men piled in after him. It was all over in a few minutes. Fires were burning in many parts of the town—before the village kirk a knot of cowering men and sobbing women huddled.

A girl ran down an alley in silent, wide-eyed terror, her breasts protruding through a torn shift, whilst two laughing Highlanders took after her.

Argyllshire had its first taste of its own medicine!

But we had little time for pillage or rapine; ours was a dual purpose—to act as a screen so that the Campbells would be unable to tell whether it were but a Highland raid or no and to gather cattle for the sustenance of the following army.

So we left Crianlarich smouldering behind us and its terror-stricken inhabitants trying to save some pitiful remnant from the wreck. Driving their cattle ahead, we raced on taking Tyndrum in our stride and not regaining the main army until we reached Kilmartin-Glassary, deep in the enemy's country.

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We brought in thousands of sheep and cattle. No longer did we shiver fireless in the heather. Concealment was now useless; every gillie had but to light a Campbell rooftree to warm his shanks and for once in that campaign their bellies were full of good food and spirits.

I saw some fearsome sights, yet, in the main, I believe not the Campbell tale of our butchery. Few of the simple hillfolk were molested unless they attempted resistance and in the outlying country they were too terrified to offer much.

Skirting Glen Orchy where the eagles wheeled and screamed in surprise at the sudden invasion of their fastness, we looked down in a drizzling rain upon the waters of Loch Awe and the fighting began in earnest. As a heavy cloud twixt the sun and the heather rolled its shadow rapidly across the mountain side, we pushed on. Smoke rising from villages and towers of the bonnet lairds were but milestones upon our way. When we met with strenuous resistance all of the defenders were put to the sword. Not a roof was left intact—from the poorest shepherd's cote to the fortresses upon the loch. All northern Argyllshire was a huge torch—mute testimony to Highland warfare of the kind the Campbells had served to their neighbours.

Yet, so little news escaped in our van that lower

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Argyll was not unduly alarmed. The Duke posted across Scotland to put his castle of Inverary in order for a siege, but the burghers of the town were not aroused, news of raiding in Breadalbane and Lorn was nothing new to them.

“Montrose was at Loch Awe! Nonsense! How could he be! No man could force the passes in the winter and if he were fool enough to try and did accomplish it, how would he again escape?”

All too late they rued their overweening confidence. We struck Inverary from three sides in the night. Some terror-stricken crofters had reached the town with the news that the Marquis was indeed at hand with fire and sword. The tocsin rang; beacons were lighted on the surrounding hills to draw the outlying Campbells in, but it was all too late. The town was not prepared to resist a strenuous attack by such a force as we brought to bear.

The sound of Alasdair’s pipes coming over the hills with a ruddy glare behind them in Glen Shira, foretold their fate.

The castle was no protection to the town in such a case. The crafty Earl escaped from it, going down Loch Fyne in a fisherman’s boat, as bursting through the barricades we rushed into the town —and Hell broke loose. Campbells with their backs to the walls fought grimly in the narrow streets

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until pulled down by bill or cleft by claymore. Gillies ran about, torch in hand, setting thatch after thatch alight. Men were dragged from attics and cupboards to be dirked and tossed into the streets. Even their faithful dogs lay weltering in the gutters.

Yet the feeble resistance over, the fury in Montrose's eye as he rode through the town issuing rapid commands for the stopping of the carnage, brought all to their senses. No one had ever been able to hold in leash the fierce blood of the Western Clans as he did on this and other occasions to follow.

The fires were extinguished and the women and children of Inverary lay cowering behind their broken doors, fearful of the worst which did not follow, as it had at Aberdeen.

Meeting Ranald, I went with him seeking quarters, when passing a house more imposing than its fellows, we were arrested by a piercing scream. The door stood wide, through which flowed a broad beam of light. Looking within we beheld a handsome girl struggling in the grasp of two soldiers.

"Mactavish's crew!" snarled Ranald, recognising them.

With a single thought we drew our weapons and rushed in. With an oath Ranald drove his long

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blade into one of the ruffians. I saw the point gleam for a moment under the brute's shoulder, before with a sob, he wilted and twitched upon the floor.

There were several more in the room. Already half-mad with drink and seeing their comrades down, they drew and came at us. My shoulder being still stiff from the blow of the pot at Crianlarich, I was hard put to it to defend myself, whilst Ranald roaring "Sannoch to us!" made a diversion amongst them. Kicking a stool into the legs of one, he ran the man through as he stumbled and with a wide parade, slashed another on the arm, causing him to drop his sword.

"Have done, you dogs!" he bellowed, swinging the girl out of harm's way behind us. "Have you gone mad? You know the orders!"

For a moment I thought that he had cowed them, but a short, dark kerne pointed at me with a whispered comment in Gaelic and they came on again. We had put a table between us and our adversaries, but just in time, for one of them be-thinking himself of a bill-hook, dropped his sword and seizing it, sought to drag us out whilst his comrades diverted our attention with their blades.

Blinded with sweat, breathless and with my arm swinging in ever-widening parries, I tried to hold my end of the table, expecting every moment to

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be my last, when with a roar which drowned the din, Dougal burst into the room with Rory Oig at his back. Up swung the long, broad-bladed axe and with a swish he lopped off the head of the little dark man and rushing into the mêlée, scattered them like chaff. Some ran up the stairs and Dougal and Rory were hard on their heels when a commanding voice cried, "Stop!"

Leaning against the table for support, I beheld the Marquis in the door with Mactavish and several gentlemen of his staff peering over his shoulder. An angry gleam was in his eye, as looking beyond me to Ranald, he strode into the room over the bodies of the men upon the floor.

"Captain Mackenzie," he barked, "what the devil is the meaning of this?"

"Sir," interrupted Mactavish, "'tis easy enough to see! These scoundrels have fallen upon my men in the pursuit of their justifiable spoils. 'Tis out of enmity to me!"

Montrose waved impatiently to him to be quiet. "I asked not you, Mactavish," he said, still looking at Ranald, who by now had caught his breath.

"Milord," he answered, "we came upon these rascals not plundering, but attempting to ravish this girl, and knowing your stern commands in this, we but attempted to bring order when they set upon us."

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“What girl?” asked the Marquis.

“Why, this—” Ranald turned and stopped in the middle of the sentence and we stared open-mouthed at each other. “Milord,” he completed, “she has gone!”

“A likely story!” sneered Mactavish, whilst others laughed and the Mactavish sept, seeing their cue, took up the denial.

“Come, Captain,” said the Marquis, looking blacker every minute. “Cannot your fertile brain evolve a better story than that?”

“The tale is true!” growled Dougal, drawing all eyes to himself where he stood at the foot of the stairs, leaning upon his bloody axe. “The tale is true. Rory Oig kens weel a lassie came running in the market-place, her hair all aglee, pointing this way. ‘Quick,’ says she, ‘some gentlemen are in dire peril and call “Sannoch” to the rescue!’ Who should she be but a Campbell woman, abroad in the toon tha nicht?”

“Was she no’ a bonnie lassie?” he asked, addressing me above the murmur of comment which his words aroused. “Wi’ golden hair and wore a linen curch and a long blue cape, clasped at the throat wi’ a silver brooch?”

“Aye,” I answered, “that she did!”

“Then, ‘tis the same,” he said, addressing the Marquis.

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“You,” he asked, “are Sannoch’s henchman, are you not?”

“Aye,” came the uncompromising reply. “His gillie mhor—fight for him, lie for him and die for him if need be, but that which I have said is the truth!”

Montrose pondered for a moment. “I would like to believe your excuse,” he said, “but you must admit that it is but poorly proved. Your man, I am afraid, might be over-zealous in your favour.”

“Milord,” interjected Sir John Stewart, who till then had made no comment, despite the murmured disapproval of the turn things were taking from the friends of Mactavish, “ ’tis at least the word of two gentlemen who were present against one that was not and one whom we all know is none too friendly in his feeling to Sannoch.”

“That is a fair supposition,” answered the Marquis. “Let us rest the matter. There is enough to do without Highland gentlemen being at their own throats. Meanwhile, you, Sannoch and you, Mactavish, I bid you keep peace amongst you till the King’s work be done!”

But just as everything seemed to be settled, that haughty pride of Ranald’s had to reopen the breach. Stepping forward with easy grace from behind the table, he bowed deferentially to the

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Marquis until the blade of his sword bent like a bow.

“Pardon, milord, there is a bit more to say. Few enough of my name are in your train, as I deplore, but we Mackenzies are not wont to take the lie, or have our words doubted. So long as there remains any doubt as to the truth in your lordship’s mind, there can be no place for me upon your staff. I beg leave to attach myself to Sir John.”

That the Marquis was vexed, as well he might be, was apparent to all, yet, with fine control he concealed it in his voice though a flush slowly rose in his cheek.

“Captain Mackenzie, you make my position difficult. This kettle of fish becomes less palatable every moment. I think it is apparent to all that I have taken no sides in this for, whichever way I turn, I should lose supporters—arms that the King needs. I beg you to reconsider—God knows I have need of you, and,” he added with a weary smile, gazing at the shambles about his feet, “you seem to have had the best of this!”

“Milord,” answered Ranald stubbornly—and I could have shook him for it—“I cannot reconsider.” And looking meaningly at Mactavish, “I think my cousin has more need of me at the moment.”

The Marquis made no reply, but turning on his

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heel, strode from the room and we followed in the wake of his retinue.

Finding lodging in a miserable inn nearby, we sat before a roaring fire discussing our troubles over a tankard of mulled malmsey. Ranald gazed moodily into the fire, his long-booted legs stretched to the blaze. I sensed the regret for his high-spirited action which was passing through his mind, yet knew that he would not be able to pocket his pride and resentment from the position in which he had foolishly placed himself. He could ill afford to give up a post as important as that which he held—one envied by many a laird with a stout following at his back. Montrose was not given to asking favours from anyone and Ranald had placed him in a position before his staff where he had to accept the resignation or back down. The soul of honour, even if he believed Mactavish guilty of furthering his own aims at our expense and of infractions most serious to the Marquis' ordnances, he could not accept our story over that of Mactavish solely on circumstance and thereby arouse the ire of many stout supporters.

"Ranald, why did you do it?"

"I had to," he said, with a toss of his head.

"Rot, man! you know he meant us well. You left him nothing else to do!"

"Well," he replied with a rueful grin, "'twas

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more than Mactavish had the stomach to do and he was in a like position!"

"Aye, and being the man he is—and mean as a serpent—he was craftier than you."

"Ah, well," he laughed, quaffing his malmsey, "'twas a bonnie fight, was it not, laddie? And you cut your teeth!"

"You forget, 'twas not the first," I said indignantly. "Was I not at Crianlarich and other affrays since?"

"Aye," he roared, "and got a pot on your head for your pains. There's the romance of wars for you! As for the others, nothing but chasing a frightened rabble! Now, tonight was different. You were fighting determined men—deadly enemies intent on doing you mischief. Don't you see the difference? That's why I say you cut your teeth!"

"And never touched one, whilst you got three!"

"No matter, after all, if I am not a better fighting man than the average, would I still be plying my trade? Besides, 'twas you they were intent on getting. You did well, laddie. I am proud of you." And then as I glowed with his praise, he spoiled it with a chuckle—"Despite the shoulder you received at Crianlarich!"

"I wonder," I queried, "what happened to the lass?"

"Aye," he said. "I had forgotten her. She must

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have slipped out whilst we were busily engaged. Now, who the devil could she be? A lady by the look—and a sprightly lass, despite her knavish way of leaving us."

"But, she brought succour!" I expostulated.

"Oh, aye. She did that," he admitted. "But do not expect much of the lassies, unless you take it! She did not come back to thank us, did she? Or fall in your arms? She brought succour and a good way too, to draw attention from herself. Still, I would like to know who she was, for I dare swear she is a Campbell of account!"

"Ranald," I said, over a second tankard whilst we still discussed the fight, "go to the Marquis in the morning and tell him that you have reconsidered."

"No, I'll not. I cannot. Besides," he added with a waggish grin, "it won't be necessary. Some day I'll save his life, get news of value, or think up a clever suggestion to send him and then he will ask *me*. No, I have other plans. Dougal told me that you were fired on from ambush in Glen Docart. Now, here is news for you. You remember the night we lay in Vorlich? Well, after we were abed, a message came that the Marquis wanted me." Ranald lowered his voice to a whisper and leaned forward, the better for me to hear. "I got up softly, so as not to disturb you, and the better

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to make time, put on your brogues instead of these jack boots and seizing a cloak from off the wall—for the night was raw—proceeded up the street. It was moonlight, but great scuds of clouds raced across its face, temporarily throwing the street into deep shadows. I found the supposed cloak was but your plaid and thinking naught of that, I wrapped it about me and stepped forth. As I did, there was a thud and something struck the door behind me. An arrow had nailed your plaid to the stout oak. An arrow, intended for you, laddie. Now you know why I would be with you. Yon men of yours are stout, but they are not always beside you! Let's to bed!"

We mounted to our room and ere we went to rest, Ranald hauled a heavy settle over against the door and laid his unsheathed sword beside him, with the Highland pistols by the tallow dip. The moonlight poured in the window. Inverary had quieted down to a shuddering slumber. A baby cried fretfully, a hound bayed dolefully at the moon and in the distance, the song of some drunken soldiers going to their quarters, slowly died away. The bed shook and I sensed Ranald's silent laughter.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Oh," he yawned. "I was thinking of how the wee man's head popped across the room when Dougal swung his axe!"

CHAPTER V

Inverlochy

JANUARY was upon us when we moved out of Inverary and marched north up the shores of Loch Awe. It was time, for the Covenant was massing an army in the South to come to Argyll's aid. Men dispatched by Leven from over the Border who would be quickly augmented by all the Campbells the Earl could rally to his standard, thirsting for revenge.

Our progress was slow, for we were laden down with the spoils of Inverary—the curse of every victorious Highland Army. The weather turned against us and with that came word that Seaforth had gathered his Mackenzies and taken the field to oppose Montrose while Baillie had amassed his army at Perth, with the intention of marching to join Seaforth and catch us before we were out of the Western Glens, between the upper and the nether millstones, with him in front and Argyll on our tail.

But Montrose was never one to wait; he had out-

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marched all his adversaries before and believed he could again. Forcing his troops to destroy most of their spoils—a wise precaution, as otherwise they would desert to carry it to their homes—he redoubled his speed with the intention of opposing Seaforth before he joined the ever-slothful Baillie.

Thus began a march which will remain one of the great exploits of military history. The main body of the army was in no condition to take the high path by Rannoch Moor, for they were still heavily laden, so arriving at the shores of Loch Etive, they skirted it to the west, while the Appin men, to which Ranald and I were attached, took the shorter route home by Glen Etive and Rannoch, where they dispersed with their hard-earned booty, promising to rejoin the Marquis on the northern march betwix Ben Nevis and Ben Alder.

The march was made in the teeth of a great gale. The snow blew off the tops in smothering gusts and we constantly lost our way. Some of the cattle strayed off in the storm and wounded men, of which God be thanked we had but few, fell by the wayside and succumbed to the elements. Yet, when we reached Castle Stewart the rejoicing was great and Ranald and I were made much of by Sir John's family. A great feast was prepared, which lasted for three days, during which the grim old fortress was packed to its limits with neigh-

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bours from all about who flocked to join in the jollifications in thanks for victory over their hated enemies and oppressors. The pipes skirled from morning till far into the night. There were games and sword and buckler matches, dancing and singing. The fare was rude to one like Ranald, familiar with the refinements of Continental Europe, but rude as it was, it was honest in its hospitality and there was plenty. Sheep and sucklings were roasted whole and the board groaned under great sides of beef, haunches of venison and such delicacies as haggis, grouse pie and fishes which had been smoked in the autumn and laid away. With it was much strong ale and native whisky for the lower table and fine Sac and other wines from France for the gentry. Sir John was much travelled and when he had Ranald for a listener, discussed with pleasure of his journeys to France and Italy.

Like all Highland homes, the place itself was bare. In the great hall where we feasted and most of the visitors lay to sleep, long trestled tables and benches to match with a chest or two and some stools before the hearth, represented the furnishings. On the walls hung some poor paintings of departed Stewarts, ancient arms and trophies of the chase. Those favoured ones who found quarters in the small confines of the keep fared similarly, but few of the windows had casements, so, such

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wind and wet as was not kept out by a cloak found entrance at will. A rude pallet to sleep upon, a peg or two and a stool, a table with a basin and ewer, which one emptied out the window—such were the comforts of a West Highland home for all but the immediate family of the Laird.

Alas! These glorious days were soon to pass. Word reached us that Montrose was at hand, having come by the long route crossing the head of Loch Etive successfully, despite attempted interference by an armed sloop which Argyll sent and which was wrecked in the storm.

Setting forth with a force of one hundred and fifty new recruits of Appin, to be followed by his veterans of Inverary when they had stored their spoils, we rejoined the main force without adventure. Again the weather broke and the streams became torrents, but we always found boats somewhere and marching through Glencoe, we reached Lochaber, where we rested but a night at Inverlochy and pressed on to find Seaforth, knowing that Argyll was lumbering along in our rear.

It was the twenty-ninth of January when we reached the head of Loch Ness. The army had dwindled to fifteen hundred men, since many of the clansmen had dispersed to deposit their spoils. Alasdair's Irish were with us, having no place to go, and the Camerons, Appin Stewarts, Macleans

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and Macdonalds, a few of Atholl and a handful of Clanranald. As for horse, we had less than fifty and they were in sorry condition.

At long last, we had definite news of Seaforth. Scouts brought in word that he was lying snug at Inverness, some thirty miles away, with five thousand Mackenzies and Frasers who had buried their ancient grudge in a common cause for the once and joined the garrison.

We moved into Kilcumin, where a council of war was to be held. The little army was weary and again starving; never had things seemed more hopeless for Montrose. We were on the edge of an unfriendly country, in the heart of winter. The glens well-nigh impassable and the weather became worse day by day. Living on oatmeal, many in rags, their feet wrapped in sheepskin for want of brogues, our men were in an ill state and desertions were common.

Well I remember the night of January the thirty-first. All the chiefs had gathered for the great council to decide the next move. I was Officer of the Day and standing guard without the house, pacing up and down wrapped in my plaid, my bonnet pulled over my ears. A biting wind blew up the street and whistled about the old buildings. The moon was almost full and everything stood out with startling distinctness against the ice and snow.

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Hours went by. There was no indication of wakefulness from the house save for the gleam of light which escaped the cracks in the rotting shutters. A cat slunk by, seeking home and I cursed in my plaid that I should be on duty in such fiendish weather.

Suddenly, there was the sound of hurrying feet on the hard ground. Two Cameron men came towards me bringing with them one well-nigh spent with exhaustion.

“Quick! Montrose, where is he?” the stranger gasped in Gaelic.

“He’s within,” I said, pointing to the house, “but cannot be disturbed unless it is of the first importance.”

“Importance! He’ll think it is, I ken! I’m Alan Macildowie of Lochaber—” and leaning towards me, he whispered news which made me start.

I grabbed his arm and not waiting to knock, thrust open the door. Montrose sat at a table surrounded by the most important chiefs, whilst the others leaned against the walls. All eyes were turned towards the door at our abrupt entry and sensing news, the Marquis rose expectantly.

“I am Alan Macildowie,” said my companion, “and I come from Lochaber with dire news!”

“Go on, man,” said the Marquis, “we have no secrets here!”

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“ ‘Tis this—I came by the highroad from Lochaber. Argyll is at your heels, having harried Glen Spean and Glen Roy. Yesterday he was at Inverlochy with three thousand men thirsting for more blood!”

A buzz of comment filled the room. For a moment Montrose stood staring through Macil-dowie and into the beyond. Today, I know the vision which passed before his flashing eyes. His weary men were in a trap, from which they must break immediately. To the north was Seaforth, to the south Argyll—uncomfortably close. Westward was a rock-bound coast and to the east, Baillie and his seasoned troops. Of the three, the vacillating Seaforth, who might turn coat again if the others were beaten, was the least to fear. Baillie, he had thrashed once and could again, but Argyll had Highlanders the equal of his own, no longer generalled by the unmilitary Earl, but by his kinsman, Sir Duncan Campbell, a seasoned commander, burning for revenge. There was the greatest strength! There was the place to strike a telling blow, whilst he still had the means—weakened as he was!

Montrose smashed his fist against the table. The look of eagles was in his eyes!

“Gentlemen, the die is cast! We go back to Inverlochy!”

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So it was that on the last day of January we began that epic flanking march. Terrible as had been the Northern advance, it was to prove that we were capable of much more behind such a leader. At dawn we quietly stole away without the sound of pipe or trumpet. Up the rocky, ice-covered banks of the Tarff the little army wound its tortuous way—a thin ribbon of varied tartans—and was swallowed by the gloom in that icy Hell of mountains.

The sky was dark and ominous with threats of further storm and the cold well-nigh unbearable when we crossed the Pass to Glen Turret. In the narrow valleys and high mountain corries which we had to cross the snow lay in great drifts. Men afoot had to beat their way through it so the Horse could follow. Those in front when near exhaustion would fall back to let others take their places. So the army staggered on!

Avalanches of rock and snow threatened us on footpaths where a slip meant disaster. Ravines had to be climbed down into with bleeding hand holds, to wallow through exhausting drifts and climb again the opposite face, there to be met again with the stinging blast of the gale when once we reached the top. How Ogilvy ever got through with his little band of horse I do not know, but somehow they found a way and kept up with us.

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Down the Pass we went and into Glen Roy—slipping—sliding—getting up and falling down—bleeding—cursing—sobbing with hate, but going on! Never a stop to rest—to rest was to freeze, to be left behind to the ravens and the foxes! All day we staggered to our goal with bloodshot eyes, hungry, chilled to the bone—near death with exhaustion. The enemies we fought that day were worse than ten thousand Campbell men!

Scouts were sent on ahead to look for Argyll patrols, but met with none. We came through defiles where a dozen men could have withheld an army, but despite the lesson of Inverary, they did not dream that flesh and bone could stand those terrible mountains in a Highland winter. The scouts were picked from the Cameron men. It was their turn to lead, for they knew the country. Those selected were archers and deer stalkers. Passing through a clump of firs they jumped an occasional roe or deer which fell to their unerring aim and was quickly gobbled up by those nearby. The blood was mixed with oatmeal and the flesh stripped from the carcass and wolfed raw, for no fires could be lit, nor had we the time. The rest of the army had but oatmeal mixed with water—and not enough of that.

The Marquis and his gentlemen fared no better than the rest, setting an example which met the

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admiration of all. Kilted like his followers, a plaid about his shoulders and carrying his targe and his broadsword across his back like any clansmen, we saw him pass, wearing bravely a Highland bonnet to which was fastened an eagle's feather by the clan badge of the Grahams.

"There goes a fighting man," said Ranald, as he passed. "'Tis easy to suffer when it brings a smile from his grey eyes!"

We pushed on through the long night and in the morning came to the Bridge of Roy and passed over into Spean. From here it was thirteen miles to Inverlochy the direct way, in which they would look if suspicious. To take them in the rear, we swung in a wide circuit following that sea of mountain peaks along the northern slope of Ben Nevis. Once a raiding party of Campbells were seen, of which not a man escaped to carry word of our coming. As if stalking deer, the Cameron men crept stealthily upon them and when in striking distance rushed their victims, cutting down those who stood to resist and arrowing the rest as they fled. From the high top where we witnessed the encounter, not a sound reached our ears. It was fought in deadly silence and even the clash of weapons was deadened by the gale.

At twilight we reached Meall-an-t'suidhe and threw ourselves down to watch the fires of Argyll's

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army where they prepared their evening meal on the shores of the angry Loch in the shadows of Inverlochy Tower. By eight o'clock all of the weary and famished army had staggered in and flung themselves down, fireless and supperless, to sleep. The moon now rose and the enemy was faintly discernible to us. Desultory fire was kept up during the night by the opposing pickets, but no attempt was made to dislodge us, Argyll thinking that it was but a raiding party of some petty chiefs come to harass him, which would disappear like mist in the morning.

I lay by Ranald in the lee of a great fir, silently looking down on the enemy's camp. One by one, the gleam of their fires dimmed and died out and the waning moon cast lengthened shadows upon the snow.

"What has your thoughts, laddie?" he asked, squeezing my arm.

"I know not. Perhaps, it is the hovering of death. I seem to feel his wings!"

"Hoot! That's no way for a Roy Sider to think. Tomorrow you'll see a sterner phase of war and come through bravely. 'Tis written! And Montrose will win again. Alan Macildowie, the bard of Keppoch, the same who brought us warning of Argyll, has prophesied it. But 'tis always so with young soldiers on the eve of battle. They lie and

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ponder of what the morrow will bring, while the veterans roll in their blankets and reck not of it. Keep your mind from it. Think rather of your brother!"

"Tell me, Ranald," I asked, "shall we ever solve the mystery of Glen Lyon?"

He pondered a minute. Then, "Aye, I believe we will. One night at Inverary I stopped some devils plaguing an ancient crone as she hobbled home to her hovel with her wee goat. Poor hag—a year or two from now they'll burn her for a witch; the down will grow thicker on her chin, her bowed shoulders more bent; her eyes will gleam more balefully through her filthier locks, and she hating herself, will hate her neighbours more and fling her curses at them. Then some moonlit night—like this—one of them will behold her sailing over the roofs upon a broomstick or, perchance, slinking down a dark alley to come out again a cat. Strange," he mused, "that she cannot foretell her own doom! Yet, she asked me to cross her palm and foretold mine. It is not here, but I shall know the place when the time comes—she told me too that we would discover your brother's slayer—

'Find the brooch which bound his plaid,
Then you will know the slayer, and his ghost be
laid!'

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—thus it ran. There was more—but no matter!"

"Nonsense!" I expostulated, "do you really believe these things?"

"Aye, I do—at least on such a night as this, when if there are witches, warlocks or hobgoblins they must be abroad. But seriously, there can be no doubt our Highland people have the gift of second sight. I have seen it also amongst the gypsies when I fought against the Turk with the Grand Duke. They also are a mountain people and have this gift. Mayhap it is the simple lonely lives they live, given to much introspective thought, which put them closer to another world beyond our ken. But they see things and know much which we cannot hope to see or know. I know not whether it is good or evil—no doubt like everything else it is a mixture of both. But Macildowie foretold the capture of Inverary and Argyll scoffed at him. He also foretold that the Campbell strength would melt in an arm of the sea and the day is at hand. I have no fear of the morrow for you or me, for I believe that old crone and we have much to do yet. Come, let's to our plaids!"

Our battle array was formed before dawn. Montrose entrusted the wings to his tried Commanders—the right under Alasdair and the left to O'Cahan. He kept command of the centre, composed of Appin, Atholl, Cameron and Glencoe men, whilst

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the second line in reserve consisted of the Clanranald and Glengarry, with the Horse under Ogilvy. Slowly, we moved forward till the lines were less than a mile apart and waited for the dawn. The men were served a little raw oatmeal mixed with cold water and the clergy exhorted their flocks. Then, as a faint light dissolved the darkness, the peaks at our backs shot streaks of gold towards our goal. The Highland men doffed their plaids and scragged their bonnets, preparing to charge bareheaded in their saffron shirts, as is their way. Targes were set on forearm, broadswords unsheathed, priming looked to and those carrying the great claymores—double-hilted with blades four feet and more in length—unslung them from their backs.

The surprise was complete. Argyll's force was astir and hastily arrayed. Trumpets blared and the Royal Standard was shaken out to the breeze. Then came the fierce pibroch of the Cameron pipes, "Sons of Dogs, come and I will feed you flesh!" and Argyll knew that he had more than a raiding party with which to contend that Candlemas morning. The miracle of vengeance had happened again!

As ever, Alasdair and O'Cahan started the fight. Opposed to them were the vaunted Lowland troops of Leven, which Sir Duncan had placed upon his

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wings, holding the centre with the Clan Campbell.

Shoulder to shoulder in a long, thin line the wings swept forward with a mighty shout, gathering speed as they went, and like an avalanche struck the Lowlanders and crumpled them up. Despite veteran experience in England, they were totally unprepared for a fearsome Highland charge. Shaken by its awe-inspiring terror and weakened by a withering volley in their faces as the clansmen dashed into their shattered ranks, they broke and fled.

Down surged Montrose and his Camerons on the centre, enveloping its now raw flanks and driving it back slowly, but relentlessly upon the reserve. This was absorbed in the general mêlée on the narrow confines by the sea, having no room to keep intact and present a second battlefield on which our strength might expend itself.

Valiantly they stood and fought, those Campbell men. Well they knew that they could expect no quarter—they who had given none!

With the Appin men we of Sannoch hacked and hewed our way—panting for breath with lungs spent and throat burning like fire—guarding here, stabbing there. Thrice I stumbled from a blow over a fallen foe, but each time Dougal, roaring, “Tullach Ard!”—the battle cry of his

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Mackenzies—stood over me, swinging his great axe like a flail and clearing the space about.

So close was the fight that I never thought of my pistols until once when I was down and Dougal was hard pressed, I shot a Campbell in the back who sought to steal upon him from behind. It was over in less than an hour. Some ran to the water where they were drowned or struck down in the waves, vainly trying to reach the ship of their chief to which he had again escaped as at Inverary. Others ran along the shore and took to the hills where they were hunted down like game.

Vainly, Montrose tried to save those who were taken. The Lowlanders were spared, but even he could not save the Campbells. Fifteen hundred of them fell at Inverlochy, including their Commander, Sir Duncan Campbell, and some forty barons. The military power of the Clan Campbell was crushed forever!

CHAPTER VI

The Retreat

WE rested for a few days at Inverlochy. The Campbell dead were stripped of arms and raiment by Alasdair's miserable camp-followers and leaving their frozen corpses behind us, we again went north.

The obvious move was to turn west and descend by way of Perth upon the capital. None knew that better than Montrose, but we had no artillery and worse yet, no cavalry. Without it such a course was madness. Our tiny army would have been gobbled up in the open Lowlands by the strong force under Baillie, well equipped with horse, which was yet to be contended with. Our only hope of acquiring it was by wooing Huntly, who, with the powerful Campbells permanently out of the picture, might take heart.

So we went slowly over the old route to Loch Ness, to learn that the news of our victory had preceded us and Seaforth had disappeared into Kintail, well pleased to let well enough alone. We

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marched down the Loch and passed the city which was too strongly garrisoned for assault and continued on to Elgin where many of the Gordon gentry joined us with the Grants of Spey. Best of all came Lord Gordon—Huntly's heir—with three hundred well equipped horse.

We were standing by the market cross when Montrose embraced him.

“Now, there'll be work for me,” crowed Ranald, tucking up his sword with a swagger. “By all accounts, this Gordon is a gallant lad, cut from different cloth than his old fox of an uncle. How the Marquis will love him for that show of horse! Now it's ho, for Edinburgh! The Estates will quake in their boots!”

On the heels of Gordon's men came another band afoot, the leader on a stout Highland pony. As they drew near, Ranald noted to his surprise that they wore the Mackenzie tartan.

“God save us!” he exclaimed. “Will wonders never cease this happy day? 'Tis my kinsman Seaforth. Watch me bait the old badger. I have not forgotten his spite at my joining the Marquis without his bidding!”

Standing with arms akimbo, he obstructed the Earl of Seaforth's way and sweeping his feathered hat to the ground in exaggerated respect, he cried to the amusement of us all—

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“Good day to you, kinsman! Now I know that I am forgiven for running off without your blessing, when you ride all the way from Kintail to tell me so. Tut! I do declare, I don’t deserve it!”

The Earl flushed red under his beard and looked sheepishly to see how others took the sally. But Montrose was not going to see any ally baited, however uncertain his support might be, and warning Ranald with a look which said, “Have done!” though his eye twinkled, he hastened to the pony’s side and with his ever courtly courtesy, welcomed Seaforth to the Royal cause.

Happy days followed. Our force changed, but nevertheless its strength was augmented. The Lochaber men skipped home with their booty as did many others who no longer feared the Campbells, but some Stewarts and Atholls remained, to which were added many Gordons, Robertsons and Grants, till Montrose felt strong enough to try his luck with Baillie on the Tay.

One night Ranald came merrily home, roaring a drinking song, to spill a quantity of gold upon the table in our quarters, which he insisted on sharing with me.

“One for you and one for me! Share and share alike,” he repeated owlishly, dividing it coin by coin. “Seaforth has gone awa’ hame to hold the North for the King while we do the fighting—

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and a good place for him! But before he left the Marquis called me to his presence and gave me command of Ogilvy's remaining horse. A compliment to the old cattle-reever—me being a Mackenzie. And not to be outdone, though it must cost him sore to give up money he took from the neighbourly Frasers, gave me this with his blessing! Told you it would come all right, did I not?"

On the ninth of March we broke camp and refreshed in spirit and strength, headed towards Aberdeen. There was much plundering on the way and we either took levy from all Covenant partisans or burned them out of house and home. There was little fighting, save for the brush with Sir John Hurry at Aberdeen in which we lost the knightly Farquharson—a severe blow to Montrose and one which he felt most keenly, next to the death of his eldest son, Lord Graham, who had succumbed to the rigours of that terrible winter campaign.

News from the South was far from comforting. The estates at Edinburgh were in a panic and to vent their spleen, declared the Marquis of Montrose a traitor, with a price upon his head. The kirk, not to be outdone, issued an edict of excommunication. These things in themselves were ridiculous to us, but their zeal went further. Many known to favour the Royalist Cause were thrown

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in the Tolbooth, among them our historian Wis hart, with Ogilvy and others of account.

On the eighteenth of March, we moved south by Stonehaven to Brechlin, where we had another brush with Hurry's cavalry, driving them across the Esk and continued on towards Dundee. The elusive Baillie now opposed us with three thousand veterans, composed principally of reinforcements sent him by Leven from Carlisle. Montrose sought battle, but the ever cautious bungler continued to give ground and would not come to blows. Finally, in despair of getting him to fight, Montrose struck boldly off for the Lowlands by the Dunkeld road.

Baillie, foreseeing his threat at Edinburgh, hastened to guard the bridges across the Forth. Easily could our fast marching Highlanders have beaten him to them, but the gallant Marquis was to suffer another of those bitter disappointments which would have broken a less determined man long before. Rich once more with the booty of the past three months, his Highlanders began deserting to their homes. The strength of the army was so dissipated that all hope of the Lowland campaign had again to be tossed to the wind. They would fight on their own dunghills like the wildcats of their glens, but once show them booty which spelt wealth beyond their fondest hopes and away they were in the night like the will-o'-the-wisp.

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Ranald fumed with rage; for the first time he had a body of horse under him, on the rim of a country where cavalry was effective and then due to the avarice of our own people, the campaign was in the air. "Curse them!" he cried, bitter tears in his eyes, "these heroes, capable of Inverary and Inverlochy, Aberdeen and a dozen minor battles, for a paltry shilling they would indirectly dirk their leader in the back!"

But the Marquis was never without a solution for his problems. If one tool failed, he tried another. Twenty-four miles away was haughty Dundee, a strong Covenant town needing chastisement. Much of his remnant army required shoes and clothing, for most of them were barefoot and in rags. Very well, then Dundee it was. After that he would see what happened. Mayhap by then some of his deserters hearing of Dundee would take heart and come back for spoils which lay temptingly in the larger cities to the south.

Leaving his luggage behind heavily guarded, he left Dunkeld at two o'clock in the morning with but six hundred foot, mostly Alasdair's loyal Irish veterans and a hundred and fifty horse.

At ten o'clock the following morning, which was the third of April, 1645, he was under the walls of the town and summoned it to surrender. There was some hesitancy on the part of the burghers, so a

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weak place in the wall was stormed and the town overrun in a twinkling. Under the stern eye of the Marquis, little harm was done to the non-resisting townsmen, but the shops were quickly broken into and shoes and clothes dragged out. More than one discomfited tradesman stood shivering with fear in his shirt, whilst the wild tribesmen donned his brogues and outer garments.

Cellars were looted and wine casks rolled into the streets where they were broached and soon the army was in a drunken fuddle. As the sun sank over the hills, there was a clatter of hoofs and Ranald dashed into the Square with word that Baillie and Hurry were not in Fife, but actually four miles from the West gates and coming on fast.

Officers dashed about beating their stupified men with the flats of their swords. Some cried to Montrose to fly for his life and live to fight another day, while others prepared to build barricades and sell their lives dearly in the trap. But the Marquis had no such vainglorious ideas. Immediately alive to the situation, he issued sharp commands that rattled off his tongue like hail from a slate roof. "Drag them to the horse-troughs and soak their heads! Smash those casks! Into the street with them!" Grabbing kernes in his own hands, he shook and kicked them into a sense of their danger. Those who had thought more of pillage than the

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grape ran out of the houses and quickly a few hundred were in good order, headed for the East gate. Meanwhile the imperturbable Ranald sat his horse quietly in the Square, a score of troopers behind him, watching the Marquis like a hawk, determined not to let him from his sight.

“Captain Mackenzie!”

“Milord!” answered Ranald.

“Take what horse you can command and ride to the West gate. Hold the road at all costs until you hear our pipes as a sign we have cleared the town.”

“Come!” said Ranald grimly to me. “I have a horse for you. You will see action like a gentleman!”

“Troopers, by the left flank! March!”

We trotted out of the town, picking up more mounted men on our way and found Nathaniel Gordon with part of his command already there. We mustered about seventy, no more. Dusk had gathered over the low ground. The hills in the distance had turned black, save where the crests were touched with the crimson brush of the setting sun. Pale faces gleamed with startling distinctness in the gathering gloom. There was not a sound save for the creak of leather and the mournful cry of the green plover. In another ten minutes it would be completely dark.

Our little squadron was drawn up in two platoons

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of a single line each, under shadow of a gentle slope, half a mile west of the town. With the quick eye of the seasoned commander Ranald had appraised his land while there was still light. Our line was drawn so as to flank the road with good turf before us.

Dimly we heard the clatter of many horses on the hard road.

“Every other man dismount and hold two horses by the noses!” went the command quickly down the line from man to man.

A moment later, a patrol went by at a fast trot and at the same time we heard Alasdair’s pipes. Someone laughed softly. Again we had given them the slip! Then we heard the thunder of hoofs from a heavy column coming along the road at a fast trot.

“Mount!” came the command.

The dismounted men regained their saddles. A horse or two neighed, but the heavy column made such a racket that they never heard it.

“Broadswords! March!”

We moved forward quickly across the field, boot to boot.

“Trot!”

Our pace gathered momentum as the horses almost as one broke into a gallop; and leaning over our saddles, we hurtled down upon the column.

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Too late, they tried to change front on the narrow road! There was a crash, something went down in front of me and recovering himself, my gallant horse leapt it. My point ripped into a black object before me and the hilt was almost wrenched from my hand as I passed over and we were through!

Drawing rein as soon as possible, those of our men who had pistols fired into the mass at close quarters before Gordon's bugle sounded the recall and Hurry's cavalry, eight hundred strong, fled incontinently back to their supporting infantry. Farquharson was avenged and Montrose had gained a respite.

Of the rest of that confused night march I knew but little. A few miles east of Dundee we regained the wake of the army. The way had been made difficult by the mass of spoil with which the drunken fools had staggered out of the town and to their grief had to discard along the way. Marching like demons, now thoroughly aware of their peril, they kept on through the night. Baillie, anticipating that the Marquis would make for Brechin to save his previous luggage train and the guard he had left there before attempting to regain the hills, hastened towards the northeast to hem us in. Again the Marquis was ready for him. Seemingly always aware of what Baillie was thinking, he deliberately followed the expected line and then sud-

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denly turning right about face, counter marched some miles to the rear and turning west, crossed in the wake of Baillie who hurried on.

Meanwhile, mounted messengers rode to Brechin bidding them fend for themselves. In all, our force covered seventy miles in less than forty hours, fought several rearguard engagements, pillaged Dundee, got themselves drunk and despite it, escaped the threefold stronger enemies. Surely no more could be asked of flesh and blood to illuminate the annals of war.

We were safe, but again in need of an army. Montrose sent off his aides once again to beat up recruits in the Highlands. Alasdair went to the Western Isle for more Macdonalds, leaving his Ulster men under O'Cahan. Black Pete to exhort Atholl and the Robertsons to further effort, while Lord Gordon rode to Aberdeenshire for more Gordons and to regain the Grants. Meanwhile, the Marquis, with the remnants of his army now reduced to less than a thousand men, took to the hills of Balquhiddar to escape the constant chevying of Baillie.

CHAPTER VII

The Plot

WHILE lying at Crief, Ranald sought me out, saying that he had evolved a scheme which he wished to disclose. It was a soft evening, so we sauntered out of town and sat down on a wall beside the road where we could talk undisturbed.

“Well,” he said, “ ’tis this that I have in mind. More disquieting news comes from Auld Reekie. Lord Napier has been seized, heavily fined and placed in confinement for no other reason than that he is a brother-in-law of the Marquis. Many others of our avowed supporters are, as you know, rotting in the Tolbooth and there are those amongst the Estates who would drag out the whole lot and put an end to them if it were not that the more cautious fear the consequences should the Marquis become strong enough to take the town. Well they know that he would string them up if they harm his friends!

“Nevertheless, they grow bolder. A courier with dispatches to the King was caught a fortnight since

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and, contrary to the rules of war, was hung. This is but a sign of how the wind blows.” He smoked in silence for a moment whilst I awaited more.

“Admitting the Marquis has carried all before him since he unfurled the Royal Standard at Blair last August—less than a year ago—what has it really advanced the Cause? It diverted many thousands of troops from England and in this, relieved to some extent the pressure there; it has eliminated the Campbells—a matter of importance only to the Highland Clans and more particularly such neighbouring lairds as yourself. But that is all. We are virtually where we were before Tippemuir.

“Laddie, I know these clansmen of ours. I know them well. I tell you I would lead a hundred claymores against the finest infantry in Europe and I have fought with or against the best. Look at the troops of Baillie—Hurry’s Horse and the seasoned Infantry which Leven sent from Carlisle! Why—we went through them like a knife in cheese. True, there were some raw levies amongst them, but the backbone was composed of veterans. Yet, and there’s the rub, you can’t hold the Clans! They’ll fight, never fear, when you get them in the field, but you cannot keep them there. We are but repeating the history of Scotland from the time of the Bruce onward.

“There is but one answer to this form of warfare.

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Eventually we will lose a battle and that's the end. Unless we can first get into the Lowlands and win a stunning decision which will rally the Lowland nobles to our Standard. They will never come over till we do—they dare not—nor would you in their boots!

"But, if Alasdair comes back again from the West with the Macdonalds and if only Gordon is successful in raising a few hundred horse, what with those we have, we can smash Baillie, though he out-number us three to one. Then before the Clans load up with booty, by waving the promise of Edinburgh, Glasgow or Carlisle before their eyes, we can get them into the Lowlands without leaving our backs exposed.

"But Ranald," I asked, "surely the Marquis appreciates this!"

"Appreciates it! Of course he does! But here is the other side of the picture. Suppose we meet with a disaster here? Even if it were repaired in time, which is doubtful, heads will fall in Edinburgh! Innocent ones! Too late then! Reprisals make sweet vengeance, but they do not sew on heads once they're lopped off! What we need are hostages! Preferably Lowland ones and that, laddie," he finished, clapping me on the knee, "is where we come in!"

"Does the Marquis know your plan?" I enquired.

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“No, I have no plan, except to explain vaguely what I have in mind. I doubt that we can form one until we get to Edinburgh and reconnoitre the ground.”

“You seem to accept it as settled that I am going,” I observed, glowing inwardly with the thrill of the adventure.

“Ach,” he chuckled, “you’ll go fast enough. You’re the logical man to assist me, or I would not have bothered to tell you; besides, I have a wee bit idea in the back of my noddle, that touches you in this—of which I’ll tell you later.

“Who could be better than you for it? Here we are within a day’s march of Sannoch. What more likely than your lads should want to go home like the rest? We would need a handful with us —let’s say Dougal, Rory Oig and Young Angus, he’s a sharp lad. We dare not take too many for ye cannot hide them. Leaving here avowedly for Sannoch, where in fact most of them would go, we turn south, dressed as drovers—in fact, it might be well to drive some cattle to avoid suspicion. And leaving the others without the walls, you and I will steal into town. No doubt you know some friend that we could trust?”

I mentioned Mr. Alexander Cameron, whom I knew to be a loyal Scot.

“The very man!” cried Ranald. “Wait, you lived

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with him, did you not? Some of his friends would know you and that is bad. Still, they may not know that you're 'out.' Hum—well—anyway, he can be useful, though we may not be able to show ourselves about his place. Now, the next thing, shall we tell the Marquis? I don't like to risk having him turn it down," he said, dubiously scratching his head, "and then have to go anyway. What think you?"

I was emphatically for telling him. So Ranald rose to go back and seek an audience with him.

"Hold hard, whom are we going to kidnap, in case he should ask us?"

"Oh, we don't know yet—the Earl of Argyll would be best, but failing him, one of the Council!"

"Lord!" I gasped. "You aim high!"

"Hoot! The higher the better for our purpose and sometimes the easier it is in the end!"

A little while later he sought me out again and we hurried to Headquarters in the only inn which the town boasted. Stumbling up the rickety stairs, we knocked discreetly on a door and a voice bade us enter. By the dim light of a single candle, I beheld the Marquis bending over a map. His long locks hid his face, but when he straightened up I saw that he was wan and thin as any of us.

Graciously he greeted us and motioned to a seat on a chest at the foot of the bed.

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“Captain Mackenzie tells me he has a proposal to make, but would not divulge it until you were present,” he smiled, and stretching out in his chair, prepared to listen.

Ranald explained his plot, much as he had to me. Meanwhile the Marquis sat with eyes half-closed. Once or twice he leaned forward and shot a question at Ranald as to a detail, but whether Ranald had thought of it or no, his ready wit supplied the answer.

When it was told, the Marquis arose and going to the window looked out on the dark street pondering. Turning, he came back and stood before us.

“ ’Tis a grave risk you propose taking and God knows I can ill afford to lose staunch friends. Yet, if it succeed, it would lift one of my gravest worries from my shoulders. What think you, Sannoch? You have not expressed yourself.”

“I think, sir—nay, I believe, that the plan has a good chance of success and that failing, we should be able to make good our escape, for barring discovery and capture, if we were to find that conditions were not ripe, it would be foolish to expose the plan when we might return to attempt it later with greater success.”

He nodded in agreement as I finished.

“To be frank,” he said, addressing Ranald, “your cousin’s attitude lends me much to the scheme.

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As for Argyll," and he smiled, "I foresee grave difficulties there. He would naturally be surrounded by a numerous train and hard to approach without suspicion. Yet, the very audacity of the plan might carry it through. I agree with you that your course had best be shaped by circumstance and any important member of the Estates would serve almost as well, such as—Tullibardine or Balcarres.

"But I cannot see you, Captain, playing the part of a drover overwell. Would it not be better to stick nearer to your calling, say as a soldier with Covenant principles? If so, to gain Edinburgh, two courses lie open to you. Either, make straight for Stirling and trust to being guided over one of the fords there by one whom I can name; or, strike across country to the Port of Montrose, seek out the Master of the Thistle, a man to be trusted who can set you ashore at Berwick, the better to approach Edinburgh from the south and avoid suspicion."

Ranald fell in readily with part of the suggestion, inasmuch as he retained his commission in the Austrian Army and a letter received from Leven while he was still in the low countries offering him a troop under his command in the Parliamentary Army. These would make it easy to pose as a soldier of fortune preparing to sell his sword. The difficulty, as he pointed out, would be to explain

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two such obvious Highlanders as Dougal and Rory Oig—for that matter, any additional men. It might well be that a returning officer would have his servant with him—which role I was to play—but hardly additional men of his own. And we were bound to need assistance to carry off an able-bodied man and ride out of Edinburgh with him. Besides, if offered a command it would hamper our plans and if we went boldly into the city without disguise, someone might recognise one or both of us.

At last we broke up to sleep upon it and in the morning we went into conclave again with the Marquis and his confidants. It was eventually decided that we should go as originally planned—as drovers, by way of Stirling, the better to take our horses, which in any event would be needed for a quick getaway with the hue and cry at our heels. Two Lowland soldiers who knew the country and could be trusted were provided to accompany us, despite the howl of protest set up by Dougal when he heard of it.

We were provided with a forged pass for one Davey Wilson, drover, and three men, to the effect that we were to be permitted through the lines, having delivered our beasts to Baillie's force at Dunkeld. To this was attached a careful copy of the latter's signature and an original seal taken from papers captured at Dundee. A couple of

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plain but sound horses were provided for Ranald and me and two suits of clothing of the sort comparatively well-to-do Lowland herders would wear, were packed on a sumpter animal which we led. Two useful cut-and-thrust swords replaced the highly ornamental weapon which graced Ranald's side and my own basket-hilted broadsword.

Letting it be known that we were off for Sannoch, we left at noon and headed northwest towards the Tay. Some miles out of the town, we halted to change our clothes—the Highland plaids and Ranald's Continental clothes going on with our arms to Sannoch and we bade good-bye to my valiant little band.

That night we bivouacked beside the ruin of a deserted farmhouse and in the morning rode boldly up to the Stirling Bridge. I, for one, had my heart in my mouth and at the last minute would have failed to command the effrontery to carry the mummery off. But Ranald was quite equal to the occasion and in fact seemed to relish his part as the loquacious and somewhat inebriated Davey Wilson of Berwick, returning with his somewhat stolid younger brother from a profitable and adventurous journey.

The officer of the guard scanned our pass and then asked us much about conditions to the north, to which Ranald spun a fine yarn, telling how Baillie

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had sent Montrose out of Dundee at the double, scurrying back to his hills. All was going well enough, and the officer was about to send us on our way when, to my horror, Ranald must invite him to partake of a morning draught of ale while our horses were baited.

Off we went to the Stirling Arms where in the taproom, Ranald now thoroughly fired with zeal for his role, like an inspired play-actor, recounted our doings in the north—of the skill and generalship of the Great Baillie, scoffing meanwhile at Montrose in a way that made him appear the veriest Covenanter south of the Forth.

“For,” said he, “these Montrose men are naught but a band of bloody robbers, fit only to steal cattle and burn the poor husbandmen’s crofts and boothies.” And he went off in a long tirade on how they ran from Baillie and how he himself would have liked to have been at their throats, but that he had cattle to deliver and the receipt for their safe delivery to cash at Edinburgh.

Burning hot and cold for fear of a slip which would give us away and land us in the Castle, I breathed a sigh of relief when at long last we again set foot to our stirrups and went forth upon our way.

Remonstrating with him, as we cleared the town, I begged him to be more cautious in the future, to

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which he only laughed, asking what better practice could we have than on that stupid soldier who was far more interested in our gossip and the ale which we provided, than our credentials. "Rest assured when we get to Edinburgh we will need to know our story well, if not before!"

As if to prove the truth of this prophecy, we heard a clatter of hoofs upon the road behind us and who should come floundering along on a wind-broken nag, arms and legs flopping as he urged the poor beast on, but a fanatical looking minister of the Kirk, who had dismounted at the inn as we were drawing off.

I knew the breed well from my two years in Edinburgh and feared the curiosity into our affairs which, true to his cloth, I was sure he would show. Lean, round-shouldered and ungainly, with huge hands and feet, he was dressed in rusty black which emphasised his cadaverous figure.

He peered at us out of close-set, gimlet eyes over a hawk-like beak, his pasty unwashed countenance crowned by a shock of startling red hair, which stuck out like straw from beneath the brim of his hat.

Drawing abreast of us he drew rein and in a thin, nasal voice addressed Ranald.

"Ah hear yeh frae Reekie, and yeh'll no mind a body ridin' wi' yeh, ah ken?"

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With poorly disguised displeasure, Ranald grunted his consent, for there was nothing else to do.

“Ah, mon! The times be terrible wi’ so many Godless aboot! An’ a minister o’ th’ Kirk is no safe frae the diels. Ye’ll be o’ th’ Established Kirk, ah ken?”

To which Ranald grunted assent with a sidelong glance at me.

“And where were ye frae? Berwick! Ye ha’ no’ th’ Berwick-side-tongue, whatever.”

“Mayhap not,” assented Ranald, “Our mother was an English woman which might account for it.”

“Aye, then ye’ll be knowing well, Andrew Murchison, th’ minister?”

“Oh, yes,” answered Ranald incautiously.

“Aye, ah kenned ye would,” he smirked with a knowing look. “Ah! A grand mon was Andie, a bra’ pillar o’ th’ kirk!”

“But your mither noo, being English, would she no be of their persuasion and how come ye Presbyterians?”

“No, she was not,” snapped the now thoroughly exasperated Ranald. “She had joined our father’s church. But in God’s name, have done, for I have thoughts of my own to think upon regarding my accounts and no care for further questioning!”

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But the zealot could not be put down. Switching to other grounds he questioned about the operations in the North, meanwhile heaping maledictions upon the heads of the traitor Montrose and all the ungodly Highland Papists who were the tools with which he sought to gain his devilish aims of overthrowing the presbytery.

“But,” he cried, “the hand of the Lord is stretched forth to crush him. Yea, like Israel conquered the godless of Canaan, so will they be destroyed—they and their children and on to the last beast in their fields. Their crofts will be razed and their fields plowed under and the land will stink with their blood until the vengeance of the Lord is appeased!”

“Me thinks ‘tis a bloody God you serve,” sneered Ranald, disgust showing upon his countenance and to silence McGilvery’s cant, for such was his name, broke into a fast trot which put an end to the minister’s tirade, for he was hard put to it to keep up with us as he rode along in our wake, well-nigh choked with dust.

But regard for our own cattle compelled us to draw rein, whereupon the indomitable minister set to questioning our men until, fearful of the consequences, Ranald was forced to interrupt and tell him to have done, that he was tired of his prying into our affairs and would have no more of it.

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McGilvery sulked in silence until we reached Carron, where we stopped to rest our horses and partake of a meal from our saddle bags. As we entered the inn with our rations to secure a tankard of ale I saw him whispering with the host, a dour-looking individual of his ilk, which disturbed me the more as they broke apart at sight of me like two who were caught at no good.

I told Ranald of my apprehension. "Aye," he said, "that fellow could play the very devil with us—the snooping, psalm-singing bastard. Yet, 'tis my thought that he has no real suspicion of our leaning, but like his kind, is forever meddling with other people's business. We will be on our guard and give him the slip at the first chance. That nag of his can do little more today. If we push on, we may leave him and reach Edinburgh well before him and lose ourselves in the town."

Following the south bank of the Forth, we hurried on, telling the disgruntled McGilvery that we had to make haste and so leaving him soon behind, we turned sharp to the right and made for Linlithgow, where we spent the night, having covered some twenty-odd miles that day. Up betimes, after seeing that our horses had a generous feed of corn, we skirted to the north of the Pentland Hills and approached Edinburgh late in the evening.

CHAPTER VIII

Warning

THE Cannon Gate was closed so that we had to seek lodgings without at the Drovers' Inn, before approaching which we parted from our men, bidding them repair to its taproom each night for an ostensible dram and await a message from us. Meanwhile, they were to find some quiet outlying place at which to stable the horses and find quarters for themselves, sticking to the tale that they were drovers' men awaiting orders.

Having made such change in our personal appearance as our modest baggage permitted, the better to throw McGilvery off the scent if he really had suspicions, we crowded through the gate with the market-folk shortly after dawn and proceeded to the Castle Inn, passing on the way the sombre Tolbooth, where so many of our supporters languished in irons. I was for going immediately to the Grass-Market where Mr. Alexander Cameron lived and frankly disclosing our venture, but Ranald would not hear of it. "For," said he, "his

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clerks are sure to recognise you and we know not their sympathies, no matter how much friend Cameron is to be trusted!"

Bidding me in a loud voice to lay out his good clothes, as he would be back anon, he went forth, having first cautioned me not to stay at the Inn in case we had been followed, but to meet him at the Market Cross in two hours.

Time passed on feet of lead whilst I awaited his return. To avoid suspicion as a loiterer I strolled about the old town, returning now and again to our rendezvous. To make matters worse, it rained dismally and finally, I risked going to the Inn and asked if my master had returned or left a message for me, expecting every moment to be apprehended by the Provost Guard. The long day was drawing to a close and dusk shrouded the murky narrow streets and still there was no sign of Ranald. I was approaching a state of panic, being now certain that something had gone amiss and ready to give up in despair when someone brushed against my shoulder and with a semblance of apology, bade me follow at a distance.

My heart leaped with joy as I recognised Ranald's form enveloped in a cloak and mustering a negligent air, I strolled along, stopping as he did to look in the tradesmen's stalls until I saw him step aside into the entrance of a Close.

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“What’s amiss?” I asked.

“Naught, as yet, save for the valour of your friend Mr. Cameron,” he chuckled in reply. “Thank God, you did not go to him with me. The man is blue with fright. He says that his clerks would have surely recognised you and might have let it slip. Had we stalked boldly into his office I am sure the man would have washed his hands of us, nor could we blame him much. I sent in word that Mr. Davey Wilson of Berwick wished to see him on a matter of collection and he came out all smiles, rubbing his hands. You should have seen his face change when after he had closed the door to his privy office and ushered me to a seat, I told him that you were in Edinburgh and that we were here on Montrose business. I told him little more, for I am sure the poor rabbit will have none of it and could be of little use in his present state of mind, if he would. Nevertheless, he insists that you must come to his house.

“The man would not let me out again in the daylight and to humour him I stayed, for to tell you the truth, this Edinburgh is a smaller town than I expected to see with all the talk there is about it. Also, I suspect that our friend McGilvery, who I find is a power in the Kirk, with the ear of many in the Estates, will start inquiries as soon as he arrives, if he is not already here, and I was delayed so long

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arguing with old Cameron that I rather feared to attract attention by meeting one who'd been loitering about the Market Square all day. 'Tis a wonder someone did not run into you that you knew; now, in Paris or London you could be lost for a year, but this place is different. Come, let us go!"

I told him that I had been to the Inn and they apparently had no suspicion of us there, and suggested that we get our baggage, saying that we were to stop with friends.

Ranald pondered upon it for a moment. "No, if we had to make a quick getaway we could not carry it and it would damn Cameron. We cannot risk doing that. The poor fellow would be ruined."

Past the Castle we went, under the West Wall, and made our way to Mr. Cameron's house. The street was dark and no one was in sight, so we discreetly knocked and almost immediately the door was opened, for he had been sitting behind it, patiently awaiting our coming. Taking my hand with a muttered word of welcome, he led me across a passage and opened the door to his outer office, which was now empty, all his clerks had long since having gone home. We passed upstairs to his private quarters where I was greeted effusively by Mrs. Cameron, a sweet, apple-faced woman, who had done much to make my stay in Edinburgh a happy one, for she had watched over me like a

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mother. Falling upon me with tears, she blurted out her joy at seeing me safe and of her fears at my coming, until Mr. Cameron bade her have done and let the laddie sup. "For," said he, "you must be well-nigh famished," as indeed I realized when my nostrils were assailed by the aroma of the savoury stew which awaited us.

After our meal, he brought a black bottle to the table and some pipes and tobacco and we prepared to talk.

"Sir," he said, addressing me, "whatever prompted you to do such an audacious thing? Surely you realise the risk of recognition!"

I answered that I had no way of learning if any in Edinburgh knew that I had been out.

"Knew!" he cried. "Knew! Did you not know that your name is on the proscribed list? That in the eyes of the Estates you are a traitor and your lands held forfeit? 'Tis a hanging matter for you, laddie, if they discover you. Whatever made you do it? Is there not enough trouble already for the House of Sannoch?"

I answered that it was my duty and that in some respects I considered the future of Sannoch more assured with the crushing pressure of the Campbells removed.

"Oh," he said, "I speak not of that, but of your coming here! I know not what cracked-brain plan

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you have in mind, saving Captain Mackenzie's presence, nor do I wish to know. Here you must stay as long as you are in Edinburgh, though I pray you go quickly whilst you can safely. I shall do all that I can to protect you for the love we bear you and the loyalty which is due your House, but I am not a fighting nor conspiring man and I cannot enter into your plots."

"Good Master Cameron!" interrupted Ranald, with a sidelong look at me, "we would indeed do poor justice to your hospitality if we did not see the reason of that in such perilous times. This slight matter which brings us here will be done within the next two or three days at most; before we enter into it, I assure you that we will leave your house and soon be without the walls, so that you and yours will be in no way implicated."

Nevertheless, Mr. Cameron implored me to give up whatever we were about and get clear of the town, nor was his urging entirely selfish interest. But seeing that we could not be shaken in the attempt, he insisted that we should stay hidden with him until we were ready to spring the plan, whatever it might be. He asked us if we had created any suspicion and we told him of McGilvery, at which he shook his head dubiously. The man was in his opinion, a canting zealot for the Covenanting cause, who would never rest until he had satisfied

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his slightest suspicion. Despite the risk, he agreed that it would be best for me to go immediately to the inn and get our baggage, saying that we were staying with my master's friends and leaving early in the morning for Berwick, thereby, if possible, to throw McGilvery off the track. In a casual way I was to drop the address of a well-known dealer in beef and on my return toss the baggage, into the Nor Loch, for it was unimportant to us and would incriminate our host if it were necessary for us to make a run for it.

Borrowing a large hat which hid my visage, though indeed there was little fear of being recognised in the poorly lighted streets, I hurried to the inn. Drawing near I slackened my pace and sauntered in by the taproom door. Someone called for the innkeeper and was told by a serving wench that he was above. Thinking to meet him there and pay our bill with less notoriety, I mounted the back stairs unobserved and approached our chamber. As I did so, I was arrested by the heavy tread of mine host coming up from the front of the house and to my horror the high-pitched nasal tones of McGilvery accompanied him.

I was already in a blind passage leading to our room and seeing the light coming nearer along the wall, I sped in desperation down the passage, and softly inserting the key in the lock opened the door

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and slipped in. In a panic I gazed about me. Their footsteps were already drawing near. Like a rabbit I scuttled across the room and dived under the bed just as they opened the door.

"They no' seem so suspecting themselves when they leave the key in the lock!" growled our host.

"Aye," whined McGilvery, "but ye dinna' ken th' circumspection o' the diels. Aye, th' canny, like all the childra' of Bashan. Drovers, they said they were. From Berwick! And good Presbyterians! Hum! And what be drovers in sic' a hurry for? From Berwick! Yet, they ken not that my brother be the minister there, good Presbyterians though they be! Mind, I'm telling ye! 'Tis the look of the soldiery they have aboot them, and if so, they be Montrose men or why the disguise?"

Meanwhile, I could hear him opening our baggage and rummaging through it, whilst the landlord held his tongue.

"There's naething here," McGilvery said at last. "No doubt they'll be back anon. I'll to the Provost and tell of my suspicion and do ye keep a laddie near to send in case they return th' noo. Th' guards we will place in the house across the street; 'twould be rash to have them here, whatever. I, meself, will come back and lay wait for them. For they'll return, na' doubt."

I heard the door close upon the pair and as their

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steps receded, I crawled from my lair and stepping to the window from which I stood well back, watched the lean and menacing figure of McGilvery as he passed up the street. The next thing was to get away before he returned with the guard. I dared not show myself below and looking from the window, I saw it was but a short way from the sill to the road below.

Cautiously I opened the casement wide and crawled out. There was no one in sight and most of the guests had left, for it was late. Little fearing that I would be caught in my egress, I drew the casement to behind me and let myself down. Stretching to the full length of my arms, my feet were within an ell of the cobbles. I dropped softly, and scuttling around a corner of the building, turned into a lane and hurried on my way.

Ranald and Mr. Cameron were still sitting up waiting for me when I returned and told them what had transpired. The latter, poor man, was in a terrible state, but nevertheless, insisted that we should remain with him.

The next morning it was still raining and despite the pleadings of Mr. Cameron, Ranald went out to reconnoitre, though he agreed it it would be foolhardy for me to do so. Muffled to the chin in a huge cloak with his hat pulled well down over his eyes he defied detection, having cut off his moustache

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and with the aid of some pigments which he mixed from grease and charcoal and sundry dye which Mrs. Cameron brought him, so completely changed his countenance that I would hardly have known him myself.

It was a harrowing day for me. I tried to read, but for the most I gnawed my fingers and peeped furtively into the street. Nor could poor Mrs. Cameron, who sought to entertain me between her household duties, do aught but think me boorishly disinterested in her efforts.

Late in the afternoon Ranald returned and told me of his adventures. Well it was that I had got quit of the inn betimes, for he had audaciously sauntered by the place and there were two or three men loitering across the street. Furthermore, by judicious enquiries, he had learned from a hostler that McGilvery had spent the night there.

Hanging about other inns, he learned to his disappointment that Argyll was home in Inverary, having posted hence the week before. "Though," added Ranald, "I doubt that we could have touched him. This town is so intimate and like a fort that it would be impossible to get him out of it alive, except by strategy. Such an uproar as we would most likely create would arouse the whole town and we would be locked in before we could get free of the walls. So we dismiss Argyll."

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He had seen Tullibardine and, Ranald laughed, he was equally impossible! Why? Because he was a great oaf of a man, weighing nigh twenty stone. The four of us could not carry him out of the city without attracting attention. As for dropping him over the walls—that was possible as they were not heavily guarded, but how make speed with such a weight? If the man did not expire from the exertion, we would be caught before our horses could bear him into the hills. No! He was out of the question. That left Balcarres, or some other important member of the Estates.

Shortly we were called to supper, after which we sat over the table telling Mr. Cameron and his good wife of the winter's campaign. Eventually, she excused herself and under the suasion of his potent spirits and the stirring tale which Ranald spun, Mr. Cameron's caution fell victim to natural curiosity and he asked us what it was that we plotted in the town.

While having dismissed all thought of his physical support, Ranald was convinced of his loyalty to Sannoch, and he frankly told him of what we had hoped and the disappointments of the day. Mr. Cameron shook his head dolefully; his prosaic mind could not grasp anything so rash. He was in the midst of further remonstrance when we were interrupted by a furtive but insistent knocking at

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the door. For a moment we sat white-faced staring at each other across the table.

It was Mr. Cameron who voiced our thoughts. "In God's name, who can that be?" he whispered. "I am unused to visitors this time of night."

Ranald rose and reached for our weapons and handed me my sword, at the same time sweeping up our cloaks and hats.

"Come," he said, "to the back door, Cameron. Open and see who it is. Meanwhile we will wait in your garden. If it is danger, talk in a loud voice that we may hear."

The little man nodded comprehendingly and started down the stairs, whilst we tiptoed after him. Meanwhile the light, but hasty tapping continued, as if urging those within to hurry.

We let ourselves out the back door, closing it softly behind us and waited in the sodden garden in the shadow of a yew. After what seemed like an hour, the door opened again and we beheld Mr. Cameron, candle in hand, peering about. As we stepped forth, he beckoned to us.

"'Tis a woman. She insists that you are here and that she must see you on a matter of the most urgent import."

"Does she know our names?" asked Ranald with surprise.

"Aye," said Mr. Cameron.

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“Strange,” thought Ranald aloud. “What is she like?”

“I did not see her face, but from her carriage and voice I am certain she’s a lady.”

“Stranger still. Can it be a trap? If so, why send a woman and not the Guard. I cannot understand it. Do you,” he added, addressing me, “know some girl who has seen you in the town? But, even so, that would not explain her coming this time of night, be she ever so forward a wench! It must mean danger! We should be off, yet, we’d better see her first.”

In the passage stood a figure, wrapped in a cape from which the water trickled onto the flags. Her face was shrouded in the hood, so that we could not make her out. Yet, she recognised us, for stepping quickly towards us, she threw off the hood, the light of the candle gleaming on her pallid face.

At the motion, we both exclaimed, instantly recognising her, for it was the girl whom we had saved from Mactavish’s crew at the taking of Inverary.

“Captain Mackenzie,” she exclaimed, looking at Ranald, “you must away. You are in grave danger! You’re discovered and within the hour the Guard will be here.”

“How know you this?” he asked.

“This evening a gentleman arrived at my father’s

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house from the North and disclosed your plot to kidnap the Earl or others high in the Covenant Party."

"How long ago?" asked Ranald quickly.

"Less than an hour."

"We have not much time," he remarked. "But a gentleman, you say? What did he look like? Was it not a hungry looking minister?"

She shook her head. "No, it was a great dark man and he introduced himself to my father as Ian Mactavish."

"What!" we three exclaimed together.

"The ungrateful hound!" cried Mr. Cameron. "This is how he would repay your father's kindness. God's curse upon him!"

"So," said Ranald, with a quick glance at Mr. Cameron, "I think we shall settle our account with Mactavish soon. You're sure of the name?" he asked the girl.

"Yes," she answered positively. "I was sewing in an alcove unbeknownst to my father when he was announced. Thinking that it was but a messenger on Government business, I held my place. Immediately he came to the point, telling my father that he had deserted the Royalist Cause, so I pricked up my ears and listened. He said that word had come to him that you and the Laird of Sannoch had been sent to Edinburgh by Montrose to kid-

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nap a hostage and that he had ridden hard to forewarn us, urging that my father quickly take steps to capture you and suggesting that your likely hiding place was the house of Mr. Cameron here. Immediately I learned the address, I caught up a cloak, bidding an old servant that I trust, to tell my father that I had retired and to sit up to let me in when I returned. Oh, sirs!" she added appealingly, "do hurry, pray, before it is too late!"

"Aye," agreed Ranald. "We may have no time to lose, yet there are some things I wish were explained. How in the name of ill luck did he know of this place? For we told no one, not even the Marquis, that we were coming here."

"Why strange?" asked Mr. Cameron. "'Tis here the rascal would naturally look first. He knew I was Sannoch's factor—" and turning to me, "he came here to sign the bond with your father."

"Heh? A bond, say you? How was that?" flashed Ranald.

"Why, the bond for the moneys which Sir John lent him to equip his men after the last Campbell raid and for the repayment of which he received the receipt from David the night that he, poor lad, was slain—God!" he cried, grasping Ranald's arm, "do you think—?"

"Aye," growled Ranald. "I more than think. I have been thinking for a long time, but could not

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find a pretext. Why, you numbskull," he added to me, "did you not tell me of this money? But enough of this— You Cameron, open a darkened casement and keep an ear without, for if they are like most City Guards I know, they'll come golumping down the street. We will dash above and make sure that we have left nothing incriminating about, then we'll be off. Bide a moment, Mistress, 'twill be better to leave by the back way and we will see you at least part way home."

As we searched the room, Mr. Cameron hurried to us, "Quick!" he whispered. "I hear footsteps as of a considerable body of men coming down the hill!"

"We are off!" cried Ranald. "Come, Mistress—this way—Cameron, God bless you! Out of your clothes quickly and into your nightcap! I think you have little to fear!"

Again slipping out the garden entry with the girl between us, we groped our way to the low door in the wall, fastened it after us, and threw the key over again. We were in a narrow lane along which ran a high wall on either side and as we turned to go, we saw a glimmer of a lantern at the far end, accompanied by a murmur of voices.

With a muffled curse, Ranald drew his sword and whipped off his long black cloak, and bidding me follow his example, we flattened ourselves

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against the wall in a shadow and held the cloak across us.

"Make sure of a man, laddie, for if we put two down, it will add to the surprise and retard them!"

I thought the moment would never come. I ground my teeth till my jaws ached, watching that light approach, hardly daring to breath. All the time, I was dimly conscious of the girl pressed to my side and I offered a hasty prayer that no harm would come to her.

"Ready!" whispered Ranald. I felt him lean forward, bracing himself.

"Now!"

He whisked the cloak aside and with a bound we were upon them. Before he could raise the staff of his pike to guard his head, I struck one down. A curse, a groan, the clatter of arms, someone dropped the lanthorn and we were through, dashing up the lane for all we were worth. The girl was in front, running like a deer, whilst Ranald pounded along in my wake.

There were but six of them and two were down, yet their warning shouts would quickly bring others from the stronger body, hammering upon the front of the house.

"To the left!" cried Ranald, as we neared the mouth of the lane and wheeling about, he fired one of his pistols into the mass of our pursuers. That

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stopped them momentarily and we sped up the street.

A dog ran out snarling and snapping at our heels, until I sent him scuttling for cover with a cut of my sword. Windows opened in our wake. By now, the whole Grass Market was aroused. We doubled back on another street, turning again to the left into a noisome alley where we stood gasping for breath.

A moment later our pursuers thundered by and Ranald laughed softly.

“For the moment we are safe,” he said. “And now, Mistress, where do you live?”

She indicated a house in back of St. Giles, a good half mile from where we were.

“Good,” he replied. “The chase leads now in the other direction and we will see you safely there.”

“No,” she answered determinedly, “they will soon come back and the search will be town wide for you. Cannot you get over the wall some way and make off before dawn?”

“Aye, perhaps we could. Still I have a mind not to leave yet, not knowing what plight we leave poor Cameron in. I thought to get away without harm to him, but now with the fight right back of his house, they would be dull indeed not to be confident of his complicity. Besides, I think we

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are safer here for a few days than we would be on the countryside, for we could not reach our horses until tomorrow night."

Silently we stood for a moment taking account of our plight and then she spoke again.

"Come," she said. "Little did I think that I would protect the enemies of my house, yet, I cannot forget the plight from which you saved me. There is an unused stable in back where you would be safe at least for the night, and I can get food to you. Certain they will not look for you there."

"Tell us," I asked, "what is your house?"

"I am Ellen Campbell, the daughter of Campbell of Ardchatten," she said proudly, and Ranald whistled.

"Lady," he added, bending over her hand, "I have seen some noble things done in my time and ignoble ones too, but there is nothing finer that I know of than that you should do this for us. Your debt of Inverary is already paid."

Having regained our wind, we made haste to quit the vicinity, scuttling in one alley and out the next until we arrived in the neighbourhood of St. Giles, as the Tolbooth clock clanged forth the hour of two. Twice we dived into doorways to stand with bated breath while a party of the watch hurried past. Eventually, we reached our destination

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and bidding us wait by a stable door, the girl disappeared around the corner of the building. A few minutes later a rusty key grated in the lock and she beckoned us to come in whilst an ancient serving woman, utterly unconcerned of our presence, remonstrated with Ellen for her foolishness.

Groping about in the dark, we found a ladder and climbed up into the mow where she warned us to stay against her coming. Digging a hole in the straw, well away from the ladder, we settled back to rest, lulled by the patter of the rain upon the slates above our heads.

“Well,” mused Ranald, “we’re in a pretty mess, I vow! But I have known worse and got out of them and I think we will again. There is one thing greatly in our favour. Aside from those at the inn, Mactavish and that damned minister McGilvery, there is none who knows what we look like. And Ardchatten’s daughter saved us—’tis a strange world. The luck of the devil is with us. Good night, laddie!” And soon the hardened rascal’s steady breathing told me that he slept.

I could not drive the thought of Mactavish from my mind. Cameron’s disclosure was food for thought. If he had paid back the loan that I had not known of to David and then waylaid him on the way home, there was ample explanation of his desire to rid the world of me.

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A cat yowled in the alley. Someone opened a window and hurled a missile at the miscreant. Rats squeaked and rustled in the straw and the tramp, tramp of the watch went by. Then silence again and I followed Ranald's lead.

CHAPTER IX

The Flight from Auld Reekie

I WAS awakened by a most aggravating tickling on my nose. Brushing my hand fretfully across my face, I heard a giggle of amusement as slowly I came back to consciousness.

“Damn!” I said, sitting up and brushing the straw from my eyes, then I beheld Ellen squatting by me with the amused Ranald at her side.

“Good morning to you, Master Sleepy Head!” she laughed. And the music of it was like the tinkle of distant bells upon a mountain side. “Is that the way you greet a lass that brings you breakfast? And would you sleep away the day with half the town already searched for you?”

I stammered my apologies, looking at her in unabashed admiration. It was the first time I had an opportunity to look at the girl with undivided attention and I was amazed by her loveliness as she sat there, a halo of moted sunlight shining upon her head through a tiny window set high in the wall of the loft. She was of more than average size

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and finely made. Her complexion was like peach-bloom, a characteristic of our young Highland lassies, and she gazed at me out of wide-set laughing hazel eyes that scintillated with fire. Her hair of a reddish golden hue was parted in the middle of her broad low brow and braided in two heavy plaits which emphasised the symmetry of her countenance. At my steady look, she dropped her eyes and an adorable blush mounted her throat and cheeks.

“Here is a bowl of porrich and a hot bannock,” she said and sat watching us like an interested child as we broke our fast.

“Tell me,” she asked as we finished, “who is this Mactavish?”

“An enemy of my house,” I replied. “One who would apparently go to any extreme to do away with me. One whom we suspect of my brother’s murder and who has already made two attempts upon my life. And when we meet again the matter must be settled for all time!”

“And furthermore, Mistress Ellen, he is the leader of the band of ruffians who attacked you at Inverary!” added Ranald.

“They were his men!” she exclaimed, a look of horror passing over her face. “And he has the effrontery to come to my father’s house! Oh, sirs!” she added, “you must have thought me

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churlish indeed to skip off and leave you so, fighting for your lives in my defense, with never a word of thanks. But, indeed, how else could I help you? And the only key to your identity was in the one word 'Sannoch' which you cried at the onset.

"After giving the alarm to the soldiers in the Square, I fled to the house of friends with whom I later reached the Castle, and there through enquiry I eventually found out who my saviours were, but by then you had gone north. Had it not been for that, I would never have associated you with the men that Mactavish denounced to my father.

"And coming to that, you must make a bargain with me. I am a Campbell, you are my father's enemies and therefore mine. I cannot succour you, nor will I help you one bit more, unless you promise me on your honour to drop this plot against us and to refrain from any further action until you regain your Army."

"Lady," said Ranald, "let me answer for my kinsman and myself. We would be of poor stuff indeed if we did not accede to your demand, as indeed we must, for it would be absurd to think that we could kidnap anyone with the whole town forewarned against us. This I will say on my honour, that we will not touch hand to weapon against any one on the Covenant side until we are

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north of the Forth—save in defense of our own lives. No more can you expect of us than that—nor less!"

"I am satisfied," she said simply, "and now I must go, for I have been here over long as it is. Lie close and I will contrive to return later in the day and tell you what transpires without."

That day was one of the longest which I have ever spent. The hot spring sun beating down upon the slates over our heads made the loft well-nigh unbearable and we dared not converse above a whisper or show ourselves for fear that some servant of the house would see us.

We discussed our predicament at length and agreed that it was useless to plan the next move until we knew how the land lay. The conversation came around again to Mactavish and the disclosure of Mr. Cameron regarding the loan, of which I had known nothing. Strange as it seemed, I had not heard of it, for it will be remembered that for two years prior to my father's death I had been in Edinburgh with the Camerons, and it was during this period that the debt was incurred. It was more than possible that my father had not wished to tell of another's embarrassment and Mr. Cameron, lawyerlike, would naturally keep his own counsel. Then came the sudden death of my father and David's ascendance to the estate.

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"No doubt," Ranald suggested, "he had called upon Mactavish to pay when the money was due and went to his tower to collect it then on his way home was foully murdered to regain the sum, the villains knowing full well that it would be attributed to a raiding party of the Campbells."

"Aye, and then came Dougal's letter bidding me return to take up my untimely inheritance. So there was little wonder that I did not suspect Mactavish and never would have were it not for succeeding events."

Could it be, that vicious as he was, he had committed this heinous crime? Yet, how else explain his bitter hatred of me, except that his guilty conscience might have prompted him to get me out of the way for fear that someday his crime would be discovered and that I would seek revenge.

It was evening before Ellen managed to return to the stable with additional food. One look at her face was sufficient to tell us that she was in great fear. Bidding us eat, for we were well-nigh famished, she launched forth upon the happenings of the day. Mr. Cameron, poor man, had been seized as we anticipated and questioned closely by her father. He had divulged nothing and though not believed, clung stoutly to his tale that he had not seen nor heard from us. He had been lodged in gaol and meanwhile his house had been ransacked

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without revealing any sign of our visit, thanks to Ranald's forethought. There was apparently one thing in his favour, slight as it was; the fact that we had put up at the inn and left our luggage there, which could be construed that we were but going to him when intercepted near his house and had since the brawl got out of the city.

Meanwhile, Mactavish, with the zeal of the convert for a new cause and fired by his vindictive hatred, whipped on the search, being confident that we were still there. McGilvery, who knowing naught of the real aim of our plot or of my association with Cameron until our discovery, had been noisily carrying on a search from the Provost's office. Putting two and two together, he had come to the conclusion that the drover, Davey Wilson, and his brother, and the Royalist plotters denounced by Mactavish, were one and the same party.

Jealous of this interference with his own cherished plans for our apprehension, he ran about offering advice, getting in every one's way. At the very moment, he was closeted with Mactavish, Ardchatten and some of the city officials, urging that Mactavish be dispatched north with a warrant for our arrest, in case we had won free from the city and were making for Sannoch.

For himself, he asked a pass so as to continue the

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search without the gates, for remembering that we had been a party of four, while but two arrived at the inn, he correctly surmised that we had left our men and horses without.

“When learned you this?” asked Ranald, interrupting the girl’s story.

“But half an hour since,” she replied.

“That’s our cue,” said Ranald. “I see we must away, for if he searches well,—and I make no doubt he will—our men will be found, and without horses the game’s up!”

“What would you do?” the girl asked almost tearfully. “I can see no way for you. The walls are now doubly guarded and even of my father I am fearful. He noticed that I am perturbed and recalled that it was you that rescued me at Inverary. He has not disclosed that to Mactavish for some reason, keeping his own counsel. Yet, I dare not confess my complicity in your hiding. He is a Campbell and he cannot forget what we have suffered at the hands of your Marquis. If you were his own son, he would turn you over to the Covenant, yet in his heart I know not if he would wish you caught.

“This noon he suddenly shot a question at me as I sat gazing disconsolately at my plate. ‘Daughter, know you anything of this Sannoch and his whereabouts?’ I stammered a denial and he looked

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at me long and searchingly. ‘Do not forget,’ he added, ‘that what he did for you was the duty of a Highland gentleman. It has nothing to do with his military duty, or the harm which he and his have done our cause. It comes to me that this Sannoch led Montrose’s army into Argyllshire and you know with what results.’ You see,” she added, with a gesture of futility, “I know not what to do. The blood of my kinsmen is on your hands, yet you saved me from the worst a maid may fear!”

“Ellen,” I said, “we’re going now. We cannot suffer you to take more risk for us and the sooner we are off the better for us, too. How we’ll get out I know not, but I have faith in this wily cousin of mine. Do one more thing for me when we are gone: come what may, brave your father’s wrath for the sake of an innocent man and tell him the truth about poor Mr. Cameron. Tell him on my honour that he had no part in our plot and but sought to make us desist and leave the town. I swear to you that this is the truth—and tell Ardchatten this for me—that out of the devotion I owe his daughter, come what may, I shall never raise arms against one who wears the Campbell tartan, except in self-defense. Montrose is gallant and, when I tell him the reason, will place us elsewhere on the line. So far as Sannoch is concerned, the ancient grudge is buried.”

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"I believe you," she said in a husky voice, and I could see her eyes glowing in the dusk. "God keep you, Sannoch! Your promise may bring the dawn of peace in that unhappy land along our marches."

I looked into her lovely eyes and forgot my companion; forgot that she was a Campbell and I of an enemy clan. Ellen had haunted my brain ever since that night at Inverary—wondering who and where she was. Now that I had found her, we were going our separate ways and I would probably never see her again. A strange longing swept over me to take her in my arms—I wanted this maid, Campbell or no, for my own.

I have wondered since what prompted me to act as I did; I was not given like Ranald to bussing every likely lass I saw. Perhaps it was the life we led; I was rapidly learning to take what I wanted. Perhaps it was a challenge in her eyes. I stretched out my arms and drew her to me, the perfume of her hair in my nostrils, and held her, my lips seeking hers. For one all too fleeting moment she stood thus in my arms, her warm body against mine, returning my embrace and kiss. Then wrenching herself free with a little catch of the breath she held me off.

"We may be mad, but I'm glad you did that, laddie!" she said, her face aflame. "Now come, you must hasten, the watch has just gone by."

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Following Ranald down the ladder, she held forth her hand to him and he bent over it gallantly.

“Mistress,” he said, “Sannoch’s loyalty is mine; we Mackenzies are far removed from Argyll and have no feud with your clan—so on that score you may add my promise to his, for I am his adopted Dhonnie-Wassel.”

“God keep you both!” she whispered again. “I shall pray for you—always.” And as she shut the little door behind us, I heard the patter of her feet as she hurried away.

“Come!” said Ranald, nor did he ever allude to that moment sacred to me, when we stood in the mow.

Loosening his sword in its sheath, he started hurriedly away. There was a faint glow in the western sky as we wended our way through the dark streets.

“Where are we making for?” I asked, when at last I had driven the thought of Ellen from my mind.

“To the abode of friend McGilvery,” said the imperturbable Ranald.

“What?” I gasped. “What do we there, in God’s name?”

“Why, wait for him and thank him for a certain pass issued by Ardchatten permitting him to leave the proud city of Edinburgh. Incidentally, when one is pursued the safest hiding place is close

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to the gaol. I doubt that they would look for us in the chambers of that zealous Covenanter, within but a stone's throw of the Tolbooth!"

"Are you sure of where it is?" I asked.

"Certain sure," he said, "it's two flights up on the left in Weir's Close. I learned that yesterday. If he is not there and has no servant, we must wait on the stairs, which will be risky. If there is a servant and we gain entrance, he must be handled silently, so be ready. There can be no mistake in this, laddie. It's our last card. Again, the minister may have got there before us, which I hope he hasn't. He may even have been and gone, or he may come with several others and we will have to wait and pray that they leave before him. A hundred things may happen, so use your wits!"

We turned into the entrance of the Close and mounted a narrow winding stairs to the left. As we reached the second floor we noticed a gleam of light beneath the door.

Ranald knocked and stood ready, his hand beneath his cloak.

"Who's there?" growled a voice within.

"A message from the Provost for Mr. McGilvery," promptly answered Ranald.

"'Tis the floor above," answered the voice. "In God's name, canna' a body have any peace. Messengers! 'Tis naethin' but messengers, the dee long!"

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Rap loud, for the auld troll is as deef as a post!"

Thanking our unseen director, we mounted the stairs.

"The first mistake," said Ranald. "But there's luck in it. 'Tis a woman he has for a servant. Apparently he is out. She is deaf, so will probably open the readier to hear as there have been a lot of messengers. So, we try again!"

Pounding upon the door, fit to wake the dead, our ears were rewarded by the sound of shuffling feet within.

"Aye," said a squeaky voice.

"Open!" demanded Ranald. "A message for McGilvery!"

We heard a bolt loosed and the door swung open. The ancient slattern who answered for the minister's servant held out a grimy hand.

"You canna'!" she snapped, as Ranald set his foot in the door. She sought to close it, but his long arm shot out, stifling a scream in her gullet ere she made a sound.

"Quick!" he whispered. "Fasten the door!"

Fortunately the old wretch was barefooted or her kicking and stamping might have aroused those below.

"Find something to gag her with. If I hold the hell-cat this way much longer I shall throttle her!"

I found an old cloak which I tore into strips,

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first stopping her mouth with a piece, then binding her hands and feet, we carried her into an adjoining room and laid her on the minister's bed.

"Now, let's see," said Ranald, looking about. "What's to do next? For we may have little time. Something stronger to bind the minister. Ah! These will do excellently well," picking up some harness straps in a corner. "Now, a gag! Another piece of that cloak will serve. One candle in the far corner will do, the better for defense if he comes with company."

He gazed about the room again, his mind working like the perfect engine it was.

"We need pen and ink. A minister should have that! Yes, here it is, and now I wonder if McGilvery has a pair of shears? Ah well, no matter, your dirk will serve. Now, while I sit down here, be good enough to cut off my locks. Don't worry about appearance. Just so they will not show under my hat!"

"In God's name, what is this for?" I asked.

"Wait, and you will see. I make this sacrifice in part for you! Now, while we wait, I would suggest that we sample of this stew; it smells savoury despite the slut who made it and the Lord knows when we will sup again!"

But I shook my head. I could not have swallowed food at the moment had my life depended upon

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it. I went back to look at the old woman and whispered in her ear that we meant her no harm and she had nothing to fear, but she only stared at me, wild-eyed with fright. So I examined her bonds and rejoined Ranald, who sat at the table with a bottle of wine. I did manage to gulp down a cup of that, when my interest in it was arrested by the sound of steps upon the stairs. Ranald pointed to a position behind the door, which I took. The steps reached the landing and hesitated without, and then came a lusty rapping. Ranald did not answer, but dirk in hand stood in the centre of the room. His eyes were two glints of steel between half-closed lids.

Again, the rapping louder than before, then came the nasal twanging of McGilvery.

“Moll! Ye auld tawpy! Open the door, do ye hear!”

Ranald scuttled across the room and slowly slid back the bolt, just as the old woman had done for us, keeping his presence behind it as it slowly gave way. McGilvery roughly thrust it open.

“You—” he started and the words froze upon his lips, for the point of Ranald’s dirk was at his throat, whilst with the other hand he grasped the minister by the collar of his coat.

“One sound,” he whispered, “and you are a corpse!”

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I closed and bolted the door and turned to look at our captive. His pasty face was as white as the dirty linen at his neck, down which ran a trickle of blood where Ranald's menacing dirk had stung him. I brought the straps and the gag, but the man was trying to command himself and turned his head sideways to avoid the cloth. Swallowing hard, he at last managed to speak.

"Ye durst not do it," he gasped. "Ye'll hang for it!"

"Have done your chatter!" growled Ranald, grasping his neck for fear he would cry out. "Open your mouth, you canting son of a bitch!" and with that he dug the point of his dirk between his teeth. The minister wilted, for he knew that he was confronted by determined men and I stuffed the gag between his bleeding lips.

"That's better!" said Ranald. "Now off with his clothes for I need that rusty black." Stripping him to his shirt and drawers, we bound him hand and foot to a heavy chair. He sat gazing balefully at us as Ranald took off his own garments and put on the minister's.

"Now, let's look at his pass," said Ranald, when he was clothed again. "Hm, for one: 'Permit Mr. McGilvery, pastor of St. Cuthbert's, to pass at will through the Cannon Gate, signed Campbell of Ardchatten and David Leslie.' They make doubly

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sure. Well, we will mend that!" and with a few deft strokes of the pen, he added in much the same hand—"with his servant."

"Now," he said, having carefully sanded his forgery, "just a few of your locks, Mr. McGilvery. I had rather you wear them than I, but needs must when the devil drives!"

With that he proceeded to shear off the minister's scraggly red locks close to his pate. "I have looked all over for the sealing wax. Hello, what's this? Hum, well, I shall take that too," he said with a laugh, stuffing a paper into his pocket. "Now for the wax! Well, these old seals will serve!" and pulling one off a parchment, he melted it in the candle and proceeded to stick the minister's hair to the inside of his hat. With my assistance he got it on and despite our peril, I could not help but laugh as with the minister's long cloak concealing his sword and with his Bible under his arm, Ranald walked loose-jointedly across the room, for all the world like the preacher.

We looked once more to his bonds and at the old woman on the bed and setting the big chair in a corner, placed a settle against it so that he could not knock it over, with himself in it, to draw attention from below. Then blowing out the candle, we locked the door behind us and hurried out.

We walked briskly to the Cannon Gate, Ranald

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lapping the minister's gait, where a sergeant stopped us. "I'm Minister McGilvery," whined the imposter, in a perfect imitation of his lowland twang. "Ah have here a pass for the gillie and me'self frae the Lord Provost an' I'm in a bra' hurry—for it's on government business frae the Estates I am."

The officer who had come from the guard house, evidently had little use for ministers of the kirk and their kind, for looking closely at the pass, under the lanthorn held aloft by the sergeant, he simply said, "Pass them!" with a sharp glance at the supposed minister and returned to the guard-room. Being afoot, a postern in the ponderous gates was opened and as the door slammed shut behind us, I breathed a sigh of relief.

Increasing our pace, we hurried to the Drovers' Inn, where we had bidden our men await, praying that they would still be there, though it still lacked something of ten o'clock. Leaving Ranald standing in the shadow, for we feared to test his disguise in the light of the taproom, I went in and looking about, to my joy saw them sitting in a corner. Catching the eye of one of the men, I nodded towards the door and ordered a tankard of beer, which I sat drinking until they had paid their score and sauntered out. Waiting a moment, to avoid suspicion, although I was screaming in-

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wardly to run after them, I too left and found them down the street talking to Ranald.

“Thank God, you have come, sir,” one of them was saying as I came up, “for we could not have stood the strain much longer. It is three days since we saw you and word slipped out today that a plot had been uncovered in the town and that they were searching high and low for the culprits. Jock and I decided to wait until tonight and if no word came from you, to cut and run for it, for two strangers could not hang about here spending money every night in a tavern without arousing suspicion. In fact, to tell you the truth, the horses are already saddled in the stable of a farm house a mile from here.”

“Come on, then. We may have all night, or not a minute to lose, but I would put as much distance between us and Reekie as we can before dawn!”

We hurried up the road, half walking and half running, for it was quite deserted and time was too precious to waste. Reaching the farm house, a dog barked and the farmer opened a window to ask querulously why they did not come home be-times o’ night?

“Our master has just come,” answered Jock readily, “and we must be off at once, so come out that we may settle our score.”

“I like it not,” he said, “this coming and going

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o' nicht. It's very mysterious and I am glad you're going."

"Well," said Ranald with a show of confidence, "if you must know, we are not what we seem, but on government business, so hold your tongue and here are two crowns for your trouble!"

Just then we heard a clatter of hooves on the road.

"Out with that lanthorn," cried Ranald, seizing it from the astonished farmer's hand and dousing it, while the two soldiers, good troopers that they were, sprang to the nags' heads. A detachment of horse came thundering by as though the devil himself were after them. The rapid tattoo of their hooves melting into the distance.

"What road is that?" asked Ranald.

"The Stirling road," replied the farmer.

"Is there no shorter route?"

"Aye, shorter, but 'tis a broken track and will take you longer. 'Tis by way of Falkirk, passing to the left of Linlithgow. You'll see the signpost about two miles on from here."

As we rode out of the yard Ranald said, "That fellow can do us little harm now, for we should be over the worst of the road by dawn. For the moment we are safer in their wake than anywhere else."

We proceeded boldly after our pursuers at a

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sharp trot, the sooner to get off the main road. Coming to the signpost, Jock dismounted to examine the path which bore to the left. There were no fresh horse tracks on it, which proved that our pursuers had passed on. Swinging our horses off the main road into a field, we paralleled the track for several hundred yards, so as to leave no trace of our turning. The path was as the farmer had predicted, rough and winding. At first we proceeded at a walk to spare the horses, but since the night was clear—a waning moon shed its dim radiance above the hills—we presently made better progress, trotting at a good pace where it permitted.

We were now in a gently rolling farmland of low hills and broad valleys, thickly interspersed with little farms and copse and broken by many walls dividing the fields and pastures. It was a country affording little concealment and we were anxious to cover as much of it as possible before dawn, with which approached a heavy fog rolling in from the Forth somewhere on our left. We had been in the saddle some six hours and figured that we had done some eighteen miles since leaving the town.

Drawing off the path, we loosened the girths and Jock, who had providently brought along a bag of corn, distributed a generous pile before each

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horse. Luke had in his saddle bags a part of a cheese and some bread which we munched while we took stock of our position.

Ranald was of the opinion that we had left Linlithgow some two miles to the rear upon our right and that we were less than five from Falkirk. The horses refreshed by their feed and rest, we pushed on, riding cautiously and feeling our way through the fog which enveloped us. Suddenly Jock, who was ahead, held up his hand. We stopped and the faint jingle of equipment smote our ears. Luke's horse started to nicker and with a muttered curse, he yanked its head up. Out of the fog an unseen horse whinnied and with startling nearness a commanding voice said,

"There's something there— Ride forward to the left!"

Horse steps as of a strong patrol approached over the sodden turf. Something loomed indistinctly through the mist. I reached for my sword when Luke, with a restraining gesture, pointed. By degrees I made out a herd of a dozen fat Angus cattle which, disturbed at their morning grazing, were moving between us and the enemy. Then as one of the beasts turned to look back placidly over its shoulder, I heard a laugh and someone said,

" 'Tis naught but a herd of cattle; I tell you our quarry has passed here long since!" and as the

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voices receded in the fog, we turned our horses and quietly made off, paralleling the friendly cattle.

"Whew," said Jock. "Mon dear, that was a close shave! One more like that and me mither'll have a white-haired boy! What's to do now?"

"The sun will be well up in an hour," said Ranald. "We must find cover before then. Let us beat more to the left where the ground looks higher, for we may find a woods."

Now thoroughly confused as to our direction, we wandered about until we saw the dark outline of trees loom before us. We plunged into a patch of woods leading our horses to what we thought was safety, but we soon came out on the other side.

"This won't do," said my cousin, "if they are really industrious, they will search every such bit to-day, having failed to get wind of us on the road. On the other hand, they may simply concentrate their watch for us near Stirling along the Highland road and at the fords and ferries of the Upper Forth. There's no telling. Ride out, Luke, to the left a hundred rods or so and see what you can." In a few minutes Luke returned at a gallop.

"Captain, there is a great low moor above us, and under the high part a mile or so away is a deserted and ruined croft, but I make no doubt it will be big enough to conceal our horses and ourselves

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within. From it we could command the approach for miles around."

"Aye," agreed Ranald. "While here, they would be on us before we had a hundred yards start. Come!"

The hot April sun had burned the fog off the moor, but the low ground from whence we had come was still enveloped. Praying that it would not melt away or that any shepherd would see us before we reached our goal, we sped over the moor to the best ability of our tired horses. Reaching the ruin, we found it much as Luke had described. The thatch roof had long since gone, but the four walls were standing and leading our horses inside, we took off the saddles and rubbed their backs. The mist was receding rapidly and it soon disclosed the highroad, a thin ribbon winding along to the northwest, upon which we observed a cavalry patrol, no doubt the same one which we had so fortunately missed.

A guard was set to lie in the heather above the croft where one could see to the rear as well as in front, although we had little fear that anyone would approach us from across the moor but a wandering shepherd who might give the alarm. The lot fell to me, so the others went inside to sleep.

The hot sun beat down upon me with a beneficent warmth and bees droned busily in the heather.

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Once I saw a shepherd with his collie upon a distant brae, and occasionally someone passed along the road below. To the left was the thin woods through which we had come and over the top of it I could look down into the field where those blessed Black Angus cattle were lying, digesting their morning meal, whilst far away a sheen of silver disclosed the broad waters of the Forth.

Ranald relieved me in two hours and after I had napped, we held a council, sharing Ranald's pipe as I have since seen the red men do in America. It was obvious that we should lie there until nightfall, unless disturbed, thereby giving the horses the fullest rest. Then we could move forward quietly towards the Forth, abandon our horses and seek a wherry to row across to the Clackmannan side. Failing that, or if surprised, we would endeavour to turn west, keeping well to the south of Stirling and try if necessary to cut our way through to the hills of Buchanan, where we would be on friendly ground and safe from our pursuers.

Said Luke, "I have no doubt that they will have collected all of the boats along the upper reaches of the Forth estuary, but I have a cousin who lives near the river, a netter of wildfowl by trade. I know he will have a skiff hidden somewhere in the marsh. If we can reach him, I make no doubt that we will get safely across."

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As the shades of evening drew in, we saddled our refreshed horses and led them forth from the old building. The saddle and baggage of the sumpter horse we left behind, for if we were forced to give up the idea of the boat and were pressed hard, it would enable us to travel faster.

It was completely dark when we reached the vicinity of the main road; drawing up in the shadow of a hedge we sat and listened. Not a sound broke the evening stillness, save the barking of a tyke at some distant house and the plaintive cry of a solitary lapwing.

Sacrificing caution for the sake of speed, we trotted boldly on until the twinkle of lights warned us that we were approaching Falkirk village, so we cut across country in a wide detour, regaining the road a mile beyond. Again, we stopped to consider. We had come six miles from the moor and fortune had been with us. What should we do now? Chance the road still further and attempt to get through to the west of Stirling or make for the Forth? Any moment a patrol might come along, so while we argued in low tones we listened. Ranald, I knew, was loath to desert our horses, despite the long ride still before us the Stirling way, and getting more hazardous the nearer we approached the line. On the other hand, if we could not find the boat, we would still be south of Stirling at dawn and if

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discovered, in a bad position for escape, with nothing but exhausted horses to save us. And yet again, if successful in the crossing we would still be in enemy country with only our shanks to depend upon, hiding by day and travelling by night until we reached the Highland line.

But Luke was confident he could find a boat. It was that and the knowledge of the close watch kept about Stirling, bound to be greatly augmented by the hue and cry for us, which finally decided us. As it transpired within the next half hour, it was the only thing we could have done, as fate at last frowned upon us.

We had gone on about two miles and were passing a farm house in which all the lights were out, when suddenly we were challenged.

“Halt!” rang the command.

Following Ranald’s lead, we set spurs to our horses and went thundering up the road. There was a hoarse command, followed by a clamour about the buildings and a scattering volley of shots. Leaning low in the saddle, I heard the slugs whistle about us as we tore up the hard road.

“Turn sharp when I do, at the big oak!” shouted Luke in my ear. “Tell the Captain. We have got to distance them for the next two miles; if we turn here we’ll get bogged in the soft ground.”

I passed the word to Ranald who was riding on my

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left. His answer was to urge his horse the more, knowing there was nothing to be gained by preserving the beasts' wind for a few miles when by getting the most out of them might add a little distance needed at the Ferry.

Evidently we had ridden onto the patrol, whilst they were watering their horses and by taking the soft side of the road, the better to pass the farm house without undue notice, we had come onto them before they were aware.

It was evident that the rascals were well mounted, for strive as we might we could not increase the few hundred yards between us. In fact, as time went on, it appeared that two or three of them were slowly lessening the distance. On we tore, into the night, with the Covenant Horse thundering behind. Could we make it? One after another, harrowing thoughts flashed across my mind. Obviously, we could not gain distance enough to throw them off our track.

Suddenly, Luke stretched an arm to the left. A huge oak was racing towards us. It flashed by, he turned at the gallop and we followed, out onto a broad meadow. We gained a bit. On our pursuers came, some of them overshooting the mark and having to turn. The horses were almost winded and the last few hundred rods over that soft ground, sinking to their fetlocks, did it. Luke appeared to

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be making for a certain part of the meadow, for he stood in his stirrups, the better to see, as he urged on his faltering horse. Suddenly he halted and flung himself to the ground.

“Here!” he cried. “By the two willows. The path runs between them. Mind, for it is narrow. Follow close or you will be in the bog!”

In single file we followed his lead, slipping and floundering along through the rushes, now and then breaking into a little opening where the water lay in silent, velvety and menacing pools. The moon, both a curse and a blessing, helped us on our way, but it helped our pursuers too. Looking fearfully over my shoulder, I could see their dark silhouettes bobbing along in our wake. Shouting and cursing, they floundered after us. It was evident that none of them knew the track and that they were in difficulty, for stopping to catch a breath, we realised that they had lost distance.

There was no time to lose,—we still had the boat to find and we must be well out in the stream before they gained the bank. On we went, lungs bursting, our legs like lumps of lead. It was not the first time that I have been pursued, nor the last and I know nothing more exhausting than the fear of the hunted. On even terms, it has always seemed that the pursuer has everything in his favour.

I was ready to sink in the mud when Luke stopped

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again and, looking back, laughed. "I doubt you'll catch us this time," he said.

We had come a good half mile since we left the horses, working in and out around bog holes and tall rushes, eastward, but always nearer to the river.

Our pursuers were well distanced, when against the gleam of the water, we beheld a wee boothie, around which hung nets and other bits of gear. A dim light came through some cracks in the ramshackle place, but paying no attention to that, Luke made for a rude dock of planks which ran out crazily into the water.

"Gone!" he cursed. "He's hidden it!"

Kicking open the door he dashed in. "Johnnie," I heard him cry, "Johnnie, ye blasted sot, where awa' is the boat?"

Looking in, we beheld him leaning over an unconscious figure asprawl a dirty cot and shaking it madly.

"Drunk!" he cried. "Drunk as usual, God curse him; and the boat hidden!"

He let the man's head fall back, lolling with the smear of a mouth open and emitting strangled snores.

"Come!" he said. "There's no time to lose here. Jock! Do you search the bank to the right, whilst I try downstream. Search close, in the rushes and

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particularly any leads into the river up which he might have pushed it."

"Right!" cried Ranald. "Be fast, lads, if they come too close before you're back, we'll try to stop them."

We looked to our priming in the light of the boothie and went forth without a word. There was nothing to say; we knew full well the predicament we were in.

We heard our men slopping away on the river bank; the water rippled against the piles of the dock and the night breeze whispered eerily through the sedge. A marsh owl, ill-omened bird, flitted by, disturbed by the increasing racket of the enemy drawing steadily on.

"About three minutes more," said Ranald quietly. "Luke must find it in that time. It looks as if there were three or four well in advance of the rest. We may be able to dispose of them."

The nearest were some two hundred yards away and coming slowly, for they were encumbered with heavy jack boots and in worse case than we had been. A hundred yards—fifty—still no boat and then I heard a blessed shout from Luke and the sound of oars against tholes, thumping down the river.

The leaders among our pursuers heard it too and redoubled their efforts to reach the bank. Meanwhile, Jock came running back.

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"Stand by the bank and keep the boat out of the mud!" Ranald ordered, "and hold her there till we take care of these fellows! Don't miss, laddie," he said through his teeth. "Make sure! Your pistol against them is best. There's still a chance if we handle it properly!"

Then they were on us. A flash and a deafening roar and the first fell on his face, the second stumbled over him. I cut at his head as he fell and he lay still, while Ranald engaged the next with his sword. The trooper had no chance in his heavy equipment on the slimy ground. He swung a blow with his sabre and slipped and as the stroke went wide, I saw Ranald lunge and the figure slumped like a sack of corn in the ooze beside the path and the other two, for there were five, held back.

"Come!" cried Luke and turning, we ran for the boat, falling into it as Jock shoved off. Ranald, standing amidship, fired his second pistol towards the bank and I followed suit, our two valiant lads straining at the oars.

We had made a matter of a dozen lengths from shore when additional troopers ran up and lined the bank. A scattering fire was directed towards us and the slugs whipped the water about our craft. Just a moment more and we would be safe and then with a sob, Luke crumpled over his oar and the boat yawed. Ranald grasped the unfortunate man

FLIGHT FROM AULD REEKIE

under the arms and passed him forward to me in the bow and took his place. Soon the little craft was out of range. As the fire and din died down upon the bank, we rowed steadily across the river, while Luke lay with his head upon my knee.

CHAPTER X

Escape

LUKE stirred uneasily in the bottom of the skiff. "Where is it?" I asked, bending over him. He indicated his side, and held the place with his hand. His brow was cold with sweat and his breath came in short catching gasps. I eased his position as best I could in the cramped quarters which the bow afforded and loosening his collar bathed his throat and face with the cool water of the Forth.

After a bit the rowers ceased their efforts. We had come a long way for the river was broad. Whilst they rested upon their oars, we listened, but all was quiet. Apparently our tumultuous escape on the far bank had not aroused those upon the north shore. Through a rising mist I dimly discerned low alders upon the bank and the green of a light or two twinkling beyond.

Said Ranald, "It seems all right. We'll chance it and land here. The sooner we get ashore the better. Our pursuers may be after us any minute, though I doubt it. They must know that we would be ashore

ESCAPE

long before they could get out of the marsh and ride around to the nearest boats. More likely they will send a messenger across to arouse Clackmannan and post another to Stirling."

Rowing cautiously to the bank we drew the boat up on the shingles. Behind the willows was a broad meadow to which we bore Luke as gently as we could. Ranald knelt beside him. Untying the thrums of his doublet he deftly cut away the man's shirt and examined the wound. Luke had bled surprisingly little, which gave me encouragement. Making a pack from the torn shirt Ranald bade Jock wet it in the river, whereupon he bound it around the well-nigh insensible man with a strip of his ministerial cloak.

"Will he do, think you?" I murmured.

For answer Ranald motioned me aside. "The man is done for—'tis a mortal hurt. I know little of surgery, but never did I see one recover from such a wound."

I mentioned hopefully the lack of bleeding, but he shook his head.

"He's bleeding inwardly—the worst sign. There is nothing we can do. God curse the luck," he added impatiently. "Was there ever a worse kettle of fish! We cannot leave him, and he may take hours to die. Meanwhile the whole countryside will be up against us."

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Hot anger surged within me at this, in the face of all that the poor fellow had done for us and yet I knew that he was right. After all Ranald had said he would not leave him, so I kept my peace.

We went back and stood beside him, considering our case. Luke stirred uneasily and opened his eyes. He smiled wanly and asked for a drink. Even by the pale radiance of the young moon it was easy to see that he was far gone. Jock returned with a hat full of water, the drinking of which seemed to make him worse, for he groaned and complained of the pain in his side.

"Luke," said Ranald, "we will go and sink the boat, rest easy."

The man nodded understandingly and closed his eyes. We returned to the skiff and loaded it with stones. Towing it out into shallow water we tipped it until it filled and sank. This took considerable time and when we had done I hurried back to the dying man. He lay just as we had left him, flat on his back, with his hand pressed to his side.

"Luke," I asked, "how is it with you, lad?"

There was no answer and bending low I saw that his mouth had fallen open and his eyes stared up fixedly at the moon.

"He's dead," said Ranald looking over my shoulder, "'twas the water did it—I thought it would, poor lad. He'll suffer no more. Well—that helps

ESCAPE

solve our problem. Let us do the best we can for him and be off."

We carried the body to a nearby stone wall and wrapped it in Ranald's cloak. We covered his face with a handkerchief and stood for a moment in silent prayer.

"Come," murmured Ranald. "There lies a gallant soldier. We can do no more—let us go."

We struck out across country at a rapid pace taking our directions from the stars. The ground rose gently from the river and to our relief we soon reached firm footing on high ground, where we made good time. The lights of the countryside had long since disappeared, so when we eventually came out upon what appeared to be a main road we trudged boldly along, with little fear of detection. Some miles on we came to a crossroad where we stopped for a consultation, and decided to turn west which would take us into the hills. Plodding into the silent night until the crowing of a cock warned of the approaching day, we soon beheld a faint gleam of light colouring the sky at our backs that warned us to cover.

Clackmannan, being staunchly Covenant in principle and heavily garrisoned, we could expect little sympathy from the people and would have to fend for ourselves. So we quit the road and hurried on, fearful that we might be discovered by the sun

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before locating a hiding place. Entering a little copse we scuttled through like rabbits and cautiously scanned the country from the far side. There was a thickset hedge on our left bearing towards a bracken covered hillside, for which we made, keeping an eye out for possible watchers. And having run the gauntlet with success we threw ourselves down in the hospitable bracken to wait and watch through the day.

Said Ranald, "We shall be famished by night and I believe we would do well to approach some farm or village and attempt to find the whereabouts of the Marquis. Travelling rapidly as he does, there is no telling where he may be at present from Elgin to Glasgow—for 'tis nine days since we left him at Crief. If he is still in Balquhidder, for which he was headed, we should push west. But 'tis where they would naturally look for us, and if the Marquis has succeeded in gathering enough men to enable him to swing north in an effort to join Nathaniel Gordon, we would do well to head in that direction, the sooner to come up with him."

"But," I argued, "why not, in any case, make for Sannoch to gather my men, and then on to join the Marquis?"

"Because you have forgotten, laddie, about a certain paper which I picked up while enjoying the hospitality of our friend McGilvery."

ESCAPE

I replied that I had indeed forgotten the incident in the press of the past few hours.

"Aye," answered Ranald, "and well you might. But it none the less concerns you closely. For you see, the letter was from a certain traitorous rogue, name of Ian Mactavish, writ in his own hand to the minister importuning that worthy to use his influence with the Estates—in the event that we were not caught in Edinburgh—to have him, Mactavish, commissioned to go north and raise his men for your apprehension, and to lay Sannoch waste in the name of the Covenant. In return for which patriotic service, should he be successful in delivering you to the Estates, he should be awarded with all of your lands lying to the north of the Lyon. What say you for that, cousin?"

"Say! Why, that there is all the more reason we should haste to Sannoch before him—so that he may not surprise the Glen."

"Hum," pondered Ranald, "I have thought of that. Still I am much of the opinion of my late commander, the Grand Duke, who said when the Turks outnumbered us two to one that one good man fighting on his own dunghill, in a just cause, was worth three rascals on the other side. True, your force is small, but the place is strong and unless I mistake they'll never catch old Dougal napping. My idea is to reach Montrose with all speed and

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confront him with this letter. Remember, he is not aware of Mactavish's disloyalty and plot to fraught our plans. Nor was the Marquis all sure that we were entirely in the right at Inverary, so he diplomatically took a middle course. He constantly has buzzing in his ears the petty quarrels of those about him, and while he likes us, there is no reason under normal conditions why he should embroil himself with either side, and risk estranging some supporters. But confront him with this proof, and he will have no remaining doubt of the rascal's double-dealing and if I mistake not, will readily grant my request of a few soldiers to augment our men. Then, we will turn the tables upon your kindly neighbour. It will be his Hold instead of yours which will burn and it may be that we shall send him to scorch his feet on the hot griddles of Hades a bit the sooner."

"Tonight, we will send Jock into some village, he is the least likely to be detected, to get the lie of the land and food. Then we will make our plans."

Drawing lots to see who would take the first watch, we slept fitfully throughout the day, the better to conserve our strength and forget our gnawing hunger. As soon as night fell, we emerged and continued our nocturnal flight until the twinkle of lights warned that we were approaching a hamlet. Feeling sure that it would hold an inn, being as it was on a main road of travel, we dispatched Jock to it,

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first having agreed that if aught went amiss and he was not back in two hours that we would continue our journey. Travelling alone, he was in little danger, as we were supposed to be four in number and they had no way of knowing that one had been killed. If he had to run for it and successfully eluded his pursuers he was instructed to make his way to Sannoch as best he could and warn Dougal before regaining the army.

We wished him luck and he disappeared in the gloom while we waited beside a large white rock on the brae above the town. Time passed slowly. Ranald paced to and fro impatiently, pausing every now and then to listen. It seemed as if Jock would never return and had we not the stars to gauge the time by, we would certainly have departed before the limit set was expired. Most of the lights disappeared as the simple people went to bed. At last we heard a shrill whistle. Ranald replied and soon an indistinct figure loomed in the dark. It was Jock.

He explained that as he approached the village from the opposite side, the better to avoid suspicion, he saw some mounted troops in the street, who were apparently prepared to move on. Waiting for them to depart, he repaired to the miserable inn of the place and called for a tankard of ale, asking the landlord how far it was to Colross, which was behind us and in the opposite direction to that which we would

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take, mentioning casually that he had a distant kinsman in the neighbourhood who could give him work upon his farm.

The landlord proved loquacious, and under the influence of a second pot vouched momentous news of the army, of first import to us. The soldiers who were on the lookout for us had told him and like all landlords he felt it his duty to dispense all and sundry gossip which came to his ear.

Moving with that lightning rapidity which never failed to surprise his opponents, the Marquis had appeared suddenly at Doune while Hurry and Baillie thought him still in Balquhidder. Dashing on past the towering peak of Schiehallion, he continued through Glen Muick to the Dee, and when last heard of had been rejoined by Alasdair with fresh West Highland levies and Lord Gordon who had at long last rallied the forces of his uncle Huntly and brought him two thousand foot and full two hundred horse.

Ranald slapped Jock on the back in glee. "Well done!" he cried. "I swear I would rather have your news than a side of beef this very minute! Now we really know what to do. You're for Sannoch in the morning, but we might as well continue on the night. We cannot be more than fifteen miles, as the crow flies, from the Earn which we should cross near Castle Drummond before dawn if we push fast.

ESCAPE

Meanwhile what sort of a repast have you for us?"

Jock gave us the bread and cheese which he had purchased at the inn. It was none too much for such famished men, but he dared not excite suspicion by getting too much for his assumed journey. Having wolfed it down, off we started again to put Clackmannan behind us as soon as possible. Following rough tracks at times and again striking straight across country with the stars and the growing moon to guide us we made fast time. I had acquired a blister on my heel which made matters worse and was sore put to it to keep up with the pace Jock set and was just about to call quits when we came in sight of the Earn. Fording it and climbing the far slope we found a dingle of rowan and bracken in which I flung myself tired and leg-weary.

I slipped off into unconsciousness and when awaked by Ranald, heard that Jock had departed. It was my cousin's belief that we were less than five miles from Crief and as we were now comparatively safe, we should make haste to get in and secure definite news as to the army's whereabouts.

Going boldly to a farm we learned that we were indeed but a few miles from our destination, but the simple fellow could give us no information. He did afford us each a large bowl of sour cream and porridge, which heartened us for the journey.

The innkeeper at Crief recognised us and being

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a loyal man agreed to find two horses to help us to our goal. Meanwhile he admonished us to keep off the streets, in fact, for his sake, to stay hid in the room which he would provide as there was no telling what the leaning might be of those who saw us abroad. He led us up the familiar staircase to the room which our leader had formerly occupied, where less than two weeks previous we had laid before him our ambitious plan.

“Well,” observed Ranald, flinging himself into a chair as our host hurried off to bring food and wine, “little did we think to sit here again so soon. To speak the truth, four days ago I, for one, would not have given a farthing for our chances of ever doing so. Ah! laddie,” he added with a waggish grin, “ ’tis a braw thing to have a way with the women. Now if it were not for that innocent young face of yours, where would we be?”

“You would have found a way,” I answered, colouring under his raillery.

“I might, I daresay I would, but you must admit, Master Innocence, that she made it a lot easier. And what a lass it is! I’ll tell you the truth, if I were the marrying kind now and not a rough dog unfit for a decent woman’s society, I would have that one, Campbell or no! And,” he added, walking to the window, “you would be a fool if you don’t.”

ESCAPE

“ ‘Tis impossible,” I said. “A Sannoch and a Campbell of Ardchatten! The girl is as far removed from me as an angel.”

“Hoot! There is nothing impossible when a lad-die loves a lass, though the fact that you think so proves that you have given it thought. If you want her and she wants you, take her. All you have to do is say the word and if it’s help you want in an affair of this kind you have only to ask me. I am no a bad cupid, though I carry a sword in place of a bow.”

“Have done,” I replied, piqued that he should have discovered my thoughts, “my feeling towards her is but one of respect for a splendid girl, the finest I have known, and appreciation of her charity.”

“Hum,” he grunted knowingly, “respect might be one name for it and charity another, but let it pass. We have much to do before you will set eyes on her again and here is mine host with our supper.”

With relief I turned to the landlord for further news. We learned, while disposing of the meal, that what Jock had heard was indeed true, and the Marquis had moved on into the Gordon country to oppose Hurry who threatened it from the south-east. The Covenanters of Murray and Elgin had rallied to him. Ranald’s crafty kinsman, Seaforth, had again recanted and gone over to their cause

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bringing with him his Mackenzies, as had Lovat and many of the lairds of Sutherland and Ross. Montrose had hurried on to Skene by way of the Spey to give him battle before his force was augmented by further supports. But Hurry was weary and not to be drawn into battle in the Gordon country and had retreated before him falling back to Elgin with the Marquis in pursuit.

CHAPTER XI

The Encounter at the Inn

HAVING finished our repast, the innkeeper withdrew, promising to see about our horses and to have them back of the inn at nightfall, the better to conceal our going. Whereupon we bolted the door and lay down to sleep. Ominous clouds had rolled up from the west as we reached Crief, so I was not surprised when I was awakened by the rattle of rain against the casement. I drew a chair to the window and sat looking out upon the drenching downpour.

The rain was long overdue and bid fair to continue, arguing for an uncomfortable ride into the north. Water spouted from the leads and the kennels overflowed, inundating the narrow street. 'Twould be fortunate if we reached Aberfeldy by dawn, I mused, making Atholl the following day, before we struck off to the east; for it would be necessary to keep well within the Highland line to avoid the enemy's patrols. Perhaps it would be better to continue straight north by way of Rothiemurchus and Abernethy, cross the Spey and take to the hills in a general direction at Forres.

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I had about decided to suggest this route to Ranald when my attention was arrested by a clatter of hoofs upon the cobbles and a small coach, bespattered with the mud of the road, pulled up at the door, with two mounted men riding behind. Clearly it was someone of importance.

Drawing back from the window, I peeped cautiously out. One of the riders dismounted and went to open the door of the conveyance from which a tall man of commanding presence stepped. His large spade beard was a silvery grey and suggested one in his middle fifties, but before I could more carefully observe him another emerged. To my astonishment and horror I beheld the lean cadaverous figure of the detestable McGilvery. A hundred apprehensions flashing across my mind, I was about to arouse Ranald, when a third figure emerged and my heart gave a great bound. It was a woman, tall and slender, wrapped in a dark blue cape, clasped at the neck with a silver brooch. Her head was encased in the tightly drawn hood, but there was no denying that presence. I knew that it could be no one but Ellen.

As they disappeared in the entry, I hastened to the bed and shook Ranald.

“Get up!” I cried. “She is here.”

“What!” he asked, coming instantly awake, “Who’s here?”

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“Ellen, she has just arrived in a coach.”

“You’re mad!” he answered incredulously.

“I tell you ‘tis so. Just now a coach with two riders in attendance, drew up at the inn and she got out—I saw not her face, but it could be no other.”

“Alone?”

“NO, no! With her father I suppose, a tall man with a grey beard and McGilvery.”

With a bound he was off the bed. “In God’s name, why did not you say so first? Ardchatten here and with the minister! I but thought that the girl was following you. You’re sure? But of course you are,” with a gesture of dismissal. “But why? They can not be after us. Campbell has more important fish to fry. He must be for Hurry or Baillie, on behalf of the Estates. We are safe enough. No one who knows we are here would betray our presence. All we have to do is lie low until dark.”

“Ranald,” I said, “I have got to see her ere we go.”

“But of course you have, laddie,” he laughed. “ ’Tis of the utmost importance. You may secure information of value to Montrose. The girl must be to some extent in her father’s confidence and no doubt he and McGilvery talked in the coach. We must discover what brings them north, and the girl should make it easy. Do not give rise to suspicion and shut her up like an oyster, but by careful

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suggestion you may lead her into comments which when pieced together will give us the clue."

At this fresh indication of Ranald's callous nature, my gorge rose. Rapidly I recalled his insistence that we should take off the last man of Sannoch and leave the Glen to its fate. How, regardless of Mr. Cameron's welfare, he sought to embroil the poor man in our plot, until he saw his lack of stomach for it. His impatience when Luke was stricken and became a burden, rather than a sincere sympathy for the poor fellow's terrible plight. Well I know how cheaply he held women. That in itself was but natural, considering his life, but that he would make a tool of this lovely girl for whom he had so recently expressed admiration, — that he could suggest I should betray her confidence— was too much.

"In God's name," I cried, "have you no self-respect, and having none, are you incapable of realising others have? But an hour gone you freely admitted our debt to Ellen, probably our lives, and yet you would have me go to her in the name of friendship and the regard she has for us, to wheedle her father's secrets from her. Have you no shame or sense of honour!"

He stood coldly silent, staring at me without interrupting my tirade. Then he spoke.

"You can have all the nice sense of honour that

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you like in your own affairs, but this is war, and everything is fair, and while you are crowing so loudly about honour, don't forget, my cockerel, that you have sworn allegiance to the Royal cause and nothing, not even your madness for this lass, shall stand in the way of that. I shall have something to say about it."

"Aye," I sneered, "I suppose that you were honour bound to wish Luke dead when he became a burden."

He took a step towards me, a menacing look across his handsome countenance, and I thought for a moment that we would come to blows, but with a visible effort, he controlled himself and strode to the window where he stood with his back to me looking out. The rain continued to lash against the casements with unabated fury. Night was falling and gloom settled in the chamber as well as in our hearts. Finally he turned.

"This is the second time, Sannoch, that your disapproval of me has almost led to a break between us. There must be no third—I'll not suffer it. My views, my ways may not be yours, but they have served me well in a hard world. Perhaps your course through life will be smoother. I hope it will—if that is your desire. Mine has been a rougher road by choice. Men and women I measure to my own valuations, not theirs, with an eye to their use-

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fulness, giving what I consider a just measure in return.

“You condemn my attitude towards women. To me they are but playthings. Not one of them in a score is to be trusted. They have forgotten more of craft and cunning in their childhood than most men ever learn. The worst of them are capable of the most generous impulses, the best of them in a spirit of vengeance, or even pique, of the most dastardly and unfair acts. I keep a step ahead of them.

“You condemn me also for a callous disregard of Luke’s predicament. A splendid fellow, and a fine soldier. Living, I did all that I could for him. Dead, he is to be regretted as one no longer with us. Wounded, in our position, he was a hindrance. My code would not permit me to leave him, but I could not in honesty to myself do other than resent his incapacity endangering our lives. After all, ’tis the luck of a soldier—his turn yesterday—maybe mine tomorrow.

“I fight for the cause which pays me best in one kind or another. I give the best I have in exchange and the stake is my greatest treasure—life. I do for those whom I call my friends, and expect the same in exchange. But I don’t cry over spilt milk and I do not expect them to blubber over me when my turn comes. The hardest thing for a healthy

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minded person to retain is sorrow and that is as it should be.

“So, if we go on, you will accept me on this basis. If I respect your regard for this girl, you will tolerate my ways too. But I tell you straight, your duty is first to Montrose, not the daughter of our enemy, and if you do not exert yourself for the cause, you have been tested and found wanting. For all you know, the lives of three thousand men may hinge upon what she could tell. Would you risk this for a cavalier attitude towards a petticoat? It is not worthy of you—play a soldier’s part!”

“Nevertheless,” I replied coldly, “I cannot reconcile a betrayal of Ellen’s confidence with my gratitude.”

“So be it. Then I will act upon my own. In your joy at seeing this girl, I suppose you have overlooked the position their coming has put us in to accomplish our original purpose? Failing utterly at Edinburgh, fate smiles upon us again and places the prize, Campbell of Ardchatten, in our hands. Right on the Highland line and with but three men to assist him. How do you propose to answer that omission of duty to the Marquis?”

For the moment I was speechless. What he said was true. In my surprise at seeing Ellen and McGilvery in Crief, it had completely escaped me that here was a golden opportunity. Then a vision

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of the scene in the hayloft of the old stable passed across my memory.

“He need never know,” I murmured, thinking aloud of the only way out, and could have bitten off my tongue for having given voice to the thought.

“Never know! And you prate of honour!”

“Have you forgotten our promise to the maid not to take arms against a Campbell except in self-defence?” I cried.

“Aye,” he answered bitterly, “I have thought of it. A needless and quixotic gesture, in which I joined you because I never foresaw that we would be so placed. It was gallant of you, but who in his right mind would expect us to meet a Campbell and not have to defend ourselves? However, a promise is a promise and I will live up to it. Montrose will think us errant fools and with cause, but cannot you see in this all the more reason for gleaning such information as you can?”

“I cannot,” I said, with finality.

“Very well,” he retorted. “Go, see your maid and I will see Ardchatten.”

“To what purpose?”

“That fortune must decide, but I have no oath against getting any information I can, and God help such Campbells as set upon me.”

I said nothing. Grudgingly I had to admit that

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he was as right from his point of view as I was in mine, but I had not the grace to tell him so. Meanwhile, the landlord tapped discreetly at the door with our supper. He told us that he had secured good nags for us which would be brought around within the hour, though it was no weather for a Christian to be abroad.

Ranald asked him where his new guests were chambered, and he indicated two rooms at the end of the passage. The laird was in the first one and his daughter occupied the next. Evidently the man was unaware of the importance of his guests.

“Where is the minister?” asked Ranald.

“Below in the taproom, holding forth on religion with the men, who appear to have had enough of it.”

Scribbling a note on a bit of paper in which I told Ellen that we were here and that I must see her as soon as possible I gave it to our host, bidding him carry it discreetly to the lady and bring me her answer, but on no account, let her companions learn of it. Meanwhile, Ranald paid for our entertainment and the horses and we sat down to eat in silence. We were hardly done when he came back, saying that the lady seemed frightened at my message, and bid me come to her chamber in an hour, as her father would then be at supper. “Good sirs,” he added fearfully, “I trust that there is naught amiss in this, for the laird looks like a man of posi-

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tion and if, added to your discovery, it was found that I was in it with you, a ruined man I'd be."

Ranald laughed. "There's no danger, man! In fact, I have business with the laird, but on no account must the minister, who knows us, get wind of it or he will give the show away."

Satisfied, the innkeeper left and again we sat in moody silence. I was torn between the desire to see Ellen and fear of what would transpire between Ranald and her father. Yet I could not bring myself to question him further.

Finally, as if having made a decision, he got up and donned his hat and cloak.

"I am going abroad for a bit," he said, "and will look to our horses."

"McGilvery will see you," I cautioned.

"The worse for him if he does! I have a mind to settle with him before I leave, anyway—at least he's no Campbell! However, I believe I can slip out unseen. In a little while it will be time for you to repair to your lady's bower. Do not hurry, for I shall not beard the lion until he is in his den. Before I do, I shall tap discreetly upon her door, which will be your cue to come forth and about our business. If she tires of you sooner, await me here."

"In either case, go quickly to the stable and bring forth the horses, mount and stand in front of the door and be sharp—we may have to gallop for it."

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Keep your hat pulled down, and if any question you, answer like a lowland yokel, but it is not likely—there will be few abroad tonight."

With that he left me. My anger had flamed again at his cutting cynicism regarding my assignation, but I held my peace and I heard his footsteps receding down the stairs.

A few moments later I picked up my sword and cloak and stepped out. The passage was in darkness save for a dim light which came from below. Like a thief I crept towards my rendezvous. There was no light under either door, which argued Ardchatten was below supping with the minister. Heart throbbing and holding my breath, I tapped lightly upon the last door. A chair was pushed back within and a light tread approached. The bolt slipped and as the door opened a groping hand felt for mine and drew me quickly in.

Refastening the door she led me silently across the chamber so that we stood in the faint glow which crept in from without.

"Thank God you're safe," she whispered, "I feared for you—fear for you now. You must away the night!"

I told her that we were going, but that first I had to see her again, not mentioning Ranald's intention of confronting her father.

"Tell me," she asked, "of your adventure after

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you got free of the city. Father said that it would be impossible for you to reach the Highlands, so close was the line drawn about you. Then at Stirling we learned of your escape across the Forth and my hope was renewed. The insatiable minister was furious. He can rave of nothing else. You must away, laddie. Do not tarry here, for nothing will satisfy his vengeance but your head. That terrible man," she added, "you have made him the laughing stock of Reekie." And forgetting her fears she laughed, explaining how the story had spread all over the old town, of how they found him bound and gagged in his underclothes in his own home while we escaped with his pass.

It was the first time I had heard her laugh, a low, merry chuckle that rippled and trilled. It was irresistible and I seized her in my arms and covered her with kisses, maddened by the soft warmth of her until with lithe strength she pushed me away.

"Ellen, lassie, I love you! I swear I do!"

" 'Tis errant madness that we two should act thus. If my father knew he would rather I were dead."

"Ellen, dearest, listen to me. 'Tis not madness; 'tis fate, a fate which we cannot escape. See how it pursues us. Why should I come at Inverary? Why should you learn of our peril in Edinburgh, and bring us warning? For what reason should

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you come to this inn tonight of all nights? When I kissed you in the loft I thought it was good-bye forever. Listen to me. This is not mere chance. It cannot be. I never kissed a lass except in a frolic until I kissed you—I could not help it for I knew then that I loved you."

"Did you?" she whispered, her arms stealing about my neck. "Kiss me again . . ."

And again her soft mouth met mine. How long we stood thus I shall never know. The hot and newly awakened blood pulsed through my veins. I was conscious of nothing but the lovely creature within my arms who with the abandon of a wood nymph returned embrace with embrace and kiss with kiss. At last she threw back her head breathlessly, the better to search my face in the dimness.

"Tell me, do you really love me?"

"Do not you know?"

"Oh, you're mad—but madness or no, I like it." And with an encouraging hug, she added, "Tell me more," and pecked prettily at my lips like a bird.

"I'll tell you this—there is a difference between liking and believing, but no other woman will I ever take to Sannoch."

"Hoot!" she exclaimed. "The man is really mad—my father would pull the wee place down about his ears."

"Would he so?" I growled, taking easy affront as

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lovers always do, and nettled more by her levity than the slighting comment upon Sannoch. "The Campbells have had some three hundred years to do it but still it stands."

"Now, now!" she cautioned, "that's dangerous ground for us. Tell me rather of yourself, for the time is short, laddie,—tell me of your aims, of what you intend to do, of what you have done. I would know more about you before you go, which must be all too soon."

Briefly, as she prompted me, sitting on the bed, I told her of my house and its falling fortune. I told her of the relentless hate of Mactavish and of the just reprisal which I must claim, yet of how I hated the clannish wars and would like to devote my life to putting them down and bringing a lasting peace to the land.

"Ellen, dearest Ellen, ride with me tonight. Come into the hills where we can forget the ancient feud. What better beginning for peace could there be than that you and I, a Campbell and a Sannoch, should go out hand in hand to seek it?"

"And would you desert the Royalist cause?"

"Nay," I admitted. "I cannot do that. I led my people into it and I must bide with them, win or lose, until the end."

"And I have my father to look after. Oh, he is a great man," she added proudly, "quite sufficient

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unto himself and yet without a woman to care for him, I know not what he would do. Maybe it isn't madness for you to love me—maybe fate, as you say, did thrust us in each other's way. Then, leave it to fate. Do not tempt the hussy now, there is much between us beside the ancient feud."

"Ellen," I pleaded, "tell me, cannot you return my love? Cannot you give me a promise? Tell me, at least, that it is not hopeless."

"Is it not sufficient that you are here? Why ask for my love? Or do you think me but a saucy jade, as the minister suspects, asking any pleasing cavalier to her chamber? Love? Love that will last through trials like these—I do not know Sannoch, I do not wish to dwell on that—nor, do I wish to know the answer yet. Why make further misery for ourselves at a time like this? Let us believe that we are mad in a mad world. At least, there is no one else in my heart and you have satisfied the hunger that was there. Kiss me good-bye."

She pushed me back upon the bed and bending over, gathered my head in her arms, her trembling mouth seeking mine again. As I tried to hold her to me she freed herself and standing, drew me to my feet. Immediately her mood changed.

"My father will be here anon. He will come to see how I fare. Already you have made me lie to

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him, feigning fatigue that I might keep my chamber. Well he knew that it was a subterfuge, but thought it was to escape the odious McGilvery. He will come to bring me food, and," she added with a droll plaintiveness which made me want to kiss her anew, "I am indeed famished and you made me miss my supper. Really, you must go, but take this for me. 'Tis a Campbell badge and be not proud, if ever you are in trouble, remember, it will see you through distress with any in Argyll."

The room was now completely dark. I took her in my arms for the last kiss and felt a tear upon my cheek.

"Ellen, dearest," I murmured in her hair, "you're crying."

"Can you no let a lass have her bit of foolishness?"

"Ellen, let me bide with you till Ranald comes —as he is to do when ready for the road."

"Nay, I cannot have you here against my father's coming. Return to your chamber and await him there." Saying which she thrust me into the passage, and shut the door determinedly against me.

Returning to the empty chamber I lighted a candle so that Ranald would see its gleam beneath the door and sat disconsolately to wait. I heard a heavy tread pass by, a murmur of voices in which

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I recognised Ellen's and then the sound of a door closing. All was still again save for the swish of rain upon the windows.

Did she return my affection? Or was she just a wildly passionate girl, seeking but romance and excitement? I put the thought angrily from me as unworthy. Why then had she risked so much for us in Edinburgh? Why had she sent me away without the promise a less honest woman could easily have made? The ways of women were puzzling indeed. Damn it, why did not Ranald come and have it over with!

The door opened quietly. Thinking it was he I rose and beheld Ellen, finger to lips, in an admonition of caution. Quickly she bolted the door and turned as my arms enfolded her.

"Sannoch," she said, her eyes glistening in the light of the tallow dip, "I could not let you go, as I planned. In the dark I hid my feelings, but when you were gone, it was so lonely there. I love you, Sannoch—there's no use fighting it."

"My love, my darling Ellen," I replied, "you make me the happiest of men. Be true to me until this war is over. When that day comes, as come it will, I shall seek you. We will bury the past and live in the future—a future of peace and security for our people."

"Aye," she answered, "I will!"

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“Despite your father?”

“Aye, despite him if necessary.”

I crushed her to me and kissed her lovely hair and eyes and her bonny throat. Then came a tap at the door.

“ ’Tis Ranald,” I said, opening.

“So!” he remarked, stepping in, “she did tire—” Then seeing Ellen he doffed his hat and swept her a bow. “Your pardon, Mistress Ellen. Trying your door and getting no reply I thought to find my cos alone—I am about to visit your father—”

“No!” she cried, her face blanching. “No—you must not—have you forgotten your promise so soon?”

“I think you misjudge my intent,” he answered drily, “I never forget a promise and I do not break one, though if it were any but your father I would wish that I might be absolved from one made you. I but seek a few words with him.”

“To what purpose?” she asked. “He will not trade with you. And he has but to call his men and you are caught in a trap.”

“We have arranged for that, Mistress,” he answered easily.

At that she wheeled on me. “You’re in this too,” she cried, incredulous, colour rising in her cheeks. “You dally with me, this in your mind—how could you!”

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"Ellen, I promise you I know no more what is in Captain Mackenzie's mind than you do. But this I assure you, he means your father no harm. Surely you believe that. Nor did I know that he intended to face your father until after I had sent you my note."

"You knew enough at all events, and kept it nicely to yourself," she cried. Then wheeling on Ranald, "What do you expect to gain by this, except harm to one or the other of you?"

"I wish to know," said Ranald, "the reason for his visit to the north."

"And do you think that he will tell you? Do you think that he will be hectored by you? There will be blood in this despite your promise, and it will be on your head."

"No," he replied, "I don't believe there will. I doubt your father will force the issue and certainly we will not. Remember, Mistress, that we are loyal men and cannot suffer your father to join the northern forces if his journey is detrimental to our cause. But enough of this argument, which serves no purpose. Let us go to him together, to dissipate distrust."

"Most certainly," she said. "If you will play the fool, I go too."

She swept from the room without a glance at me and up the passage with us in her wake. Tapping

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on the door she flung it open in response to a murmur within.

Sir John was apparently busy with his correspondence which lay before him upon the table behind which he sat. He looked up, an expression of surprised inquiry upon his countenance, and rose to his feet. Ellen stepped quickly to his side and stood facing us.

“Well?” he inquired.

“These gentlemen insisted upon seeing you, father,” she replied.

Sir John looked sharply at us, first one and then the other.

“Who are you?” he asked abruptly.

Ranald took the lead. Stepping forward, hat in hand, he bowed deeply, his hand upon his sword hilt. If it had been but a courtesy visit, he could not have seemed more at ease and sure of himself.

“I am Ranald Mackenzie of Cromartie, Captain of the Royal Lowland Horse under the Marquis of Montrose, the King’s Lieutenant of Scotland, and this, the Laird of Sannoch.”

“I thought as much,” came the prompt reply and with a grim smile Sir John added, “On another kidnapping expedition, Captain?”

Ranald laughed. “No, Sir John. Chance has but thrown us together. We had hoped possibly to make the acquaintance of one or more of your friends in

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Edinburgh. But alas, Dame Fortune ruled otherwise. It might even have been you," he added in a confidential tone.

"So failing that, you renew your acquaintance with my daughter," growled Sir John, and shot a glance at Ellen. I saw her colour at this proof that her father knew of her assistance.

"Fortunately we did," Ranald answered frankly. "But she had already more than repaid any claim which we had against her. We did not know that you were aware of that."

"I was not definitely," said Sir John who, taking his cue from Ranald, fenced cautiously, "though I had my suspicions. Confident that your plot had failed I was quite satisfied that you should escape—in view of the service I owed you at Inverary, if service it can be when one who calls himself a gentleman saves a helpless woman while raiding her country. But I see no reason for carrying on this intimacy," looking at his daughter with an admonishing frown. "There can be none between Royalists and Covenanters or Campbells and Sannochs. I do not desire to be embarrassed further by this dallying."

Ranald bowed in acquiescence. "I heartily concur to your views, Sir John," he replied. "As one with, if I may say so, rather nice instincts, I would not have caused you this needless embarrassment,

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except that we are not entirely masters of the situation. We too owe our strict allegiance to the cause we serve. You would not have suffered us to escape Edinburgh had you not been convinced that we could no longer do you harm. So you did not progress the search a little nearer to home as you would have, if not swayed by, let us say, a service to your house— Is it not so?”

Sir John acquiesced with a nod.

“Exactly. Now we are in the same case, it may have occurred to you that fate has again placed you in our hands. Duty says that here is the opportunity denied us in Edinburgh. We have but to pack you on a horse and an hour’s ride from Crief will put us over the Highland line, in safe territory. And Montrose will have his hostage.”

“And what would I be doing?” sarcastically enquired Sir John, “while you were attempting this cracked scheme? Here I am with three below to assist me were I but to shout for aid.”

Tossing back his cloak Ranald shook his head in pleasant denial. “No, Ardchatten,” he said, “’twould not serve. Your sword is in the corner and I have these,” tapping the Highland pistols in his belt. “Before you could reach your weapon or shout, you would be a dead man. As for trapping us with the men below, what chance think you two common soldiers and a snivelling minister would have against Sannoch and myself? None, I assure you.

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“Of course, this is all hypothesis, for as I said, we mean you no harm, but to strengthen the case, a short while ago, while seeing that our horses were saddled and ready, I took the liberty of cutting your girths, and then unknown to the drawer, dropped a pinch of a powder, which I have found very useful at times, into the tankards intended for your men.—It made them sleep like babies—poor lads, they were very tired. So you see, Sir John,” and he ended with an expressive shrug of the shoulders and beamed genially in the laird’s face.

Sir John gave him look for look. Then he said, “If you mean no harm through consideration of the succour which I am to understand my daughter afforded you, what is your intention?”

“Merely to ask you for a frank statement of confidence. We wish to know what mission takes you north.”

“And if I refuse to answer?”

“In that case we shall have to dispose of the minister who is abroad somewhere, should he come back inopportunely, and ask you and Mistress Ellen to re-enter your coach and ride across the line to some place where you would be safe until such a time as I am sure that the usefulness of your mission has passed. I, myself, would ride in the coach with you, being more dependable in such an emergency as you might possibly create. And Sannoch would ride upon the box.”

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Sir John thought a moment, "If I agree to your terms, what then?"

"If we believe that your journey will in no way endanger the Royal cause we will bid you good night and withdraw with our humblest apologies for the interruption."

"Hum," grunted Sir John, "and if you do not consider it without danger to your cause, what then?"

"In that case we shall have to ask you to go coaching with us or give us your parole to desist until its usefulness is passed."

"How do you know that I will tell the truth or keep my word?"

"If you will give me your word on your dirk that you speak the truth, that assurance from John of Ardchatten is enough for me. But—" and for the first time Ranald's expression of geniality changed to one of stern determination—"remember this: I go to all this unnecessary trouble and quixotic gallantry because of a promise made by Sannoch to your daughter, never again to raise his arm against a Campbell except in self-defence." "And," touching the hilt of his sword lightly, "I shall keep that promise. But my allegiance is first to Montrose. Resist and you release me, and I shall go to any extreme necessary to retain you. That is my stern duty."

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Sir John looked straight at him in silence. Ellen apprehensively drew nearer to her father's side, a look of defiance upon her face. From the moment she entered the room she had not glanced at me, so completely had her father and Ranald dominated the situation. Then Ardchatten spoke.

"I agree," he said. "My mission is with General Baillie. The Estates are dissatisfied with his procedure and inability of gaining a decisive battle. I am empowered to advise him that unless he shows us a victory within a month's time a committee will be sent to counsel him, including Elcho, Argyll, Burleigh, and others."

Ranald laughed. "On the theory that a lot of addlepates are better than one. Montrose has beaten the lot individually. Is that all?"

"Aye!" said Sir John, reddening under his raillery. "That is all."

"You swear it?"

"I do," he said, drawing the sgian dhu from his stocking and kissing the blade.

"Thank you, Sir John. You are free. And now there is one more thing: You know well the purpose of the hostage which we propose to take. You are known as a Christian man. Will you also promise to use your influence with the Estates to save those poor prisoners in the Tolbooth, if the tide of battle go against Montrose?"

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“Aye” he answered readily, “that do I also. I have no desire to see heads lopped off and have ever opposed the suggestion.”

“Then, Sir John,” said Ranald, “we will withdraw.” He swept the floor with his hat, “Your servant, Sir. Mistress, yours.”

“One moment,” I interrupted. “There is one thing more.”

“More concessions?” asked Sir John pettishly.

“No,” I explained, “but only this: Mr. Cameron of the Grass-Market, who is my factor, was in no ways implicated in our plot. ’Tis true he housed us before he knew why we were there, but I assure you he would have none of it.”

“He has already been discharged from gaol, for want of further evidence,” he answered drily. “We did not know for sure that you were housed under his roof—still I am glad to know that what you say is true.”

I stepped towards Ellen. I could see that the direction the interview had taken had softened her rancour. But her father rose and stepped in front of her.

“I believe our interview is over,” he said. “There is no need for unnecessary intercourse between your house and mine. If, as you say, you are willing to bury the sword, I am glad to observe the peace with you and will use my influence with those

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Campbells nearer to you to see that it is kept. But there can be no closer bond where so much blood has been spilt."

There was nothing that I could say, but vowing inwardly that he would change his mind, I turned and followed Ranald from the room.

Descending the stairs, to my surprise he walked brazenly into the taproom and called for two glasses of spirits to warm us on our way. Fearfully I looked about me for the minister, but he was not there. The place was empty save for the drawer and Ardchatten's drugged soldiers. One sprawled on a settle while the other across the table from him slept with his head upon his hands.

"Are you not afraid the minister will return and discover us?" I asked.

"That's who I am waiting for," he answered grimly. "Go you for the horses and I will be with you, for we must on our way."

As I brought them from the stable in back of the inn, the door was wide. Ranald stood in a flood of light streaming out from within. At that moment the tall figure of the minister came across the street bending low to the storm. Ranald swung into the empty saddle and waited. As McGilvery drew abreast, he hailed him. "Good e'en to you, Mister McGilvery!"

The minister instantly recognized him and a

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gleam of triumphant hatred spread across his countenance.

“Help!” he cried. “Royalist spies are escaping!” And he sprang at the head of Ranald’s nag. It was exactly what he had anticipated. Rising in his stirrups, he swung aloft a pistol held by the barrel and with a crushing blow brought down the heavy metal butt square between the minister’s eyes.

“That’s for you, damn you!” he growled, as his victim slumped in the gutter, the water pouring over him. “Come on!” And setting spurs to our horses, we careered madly down the slippery street and into the open road.



CHAPTER XII



Auldearn

WE rode hard for the first few miles, wet to the skin, the horses floundering dangerously in the muddy road. Finally Ranald slackened the pace, as it was doubtful they would pursue us; for by the time they could organize, we would be well beyond their reach—and certainly Sir John would not be party to it.

We plodded on in silence, the horses sinking to their fetlocks in the mire, heads bent to the blast of the wind which howled across the hills and shrieked through the valleys like the souls of the damned. Great limbs were racked from the trees and hurled crashing into the inky black about us. The road seemed to lead on endlessly, so dark it was that one had the feeling of toiling on for ever in one spot.

As a dismal dawn lighted our way, we stumbled into Aberfeldy, having come but eighteen miles since ten of the night before. The town was still asleep but by dint of much hammering we finally gained admittance from the disgruntled innkeeper, who stirred up the peat fire on the hearth and made

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us a spiced posset, while we dried our sodden shanks on a settle before the blaze.

No news had he of the north, but promising breakfast anon, he left us to doze before the fire. Almost too exhausted to eat, I went to the stable to see our nags properly rubbed down and fed, knowing that a hot gruel would do them almost as much good as a night's rest and, fearing the lousy beds of such places, I curled up in the hay and was soon asleep.

Ranald awakened me at eleven, saying the day had cleared and that we should push on slowly to Blair, a matter of fifteen miles where mayhap we would secure fresh mounts. So having partaken of another snack, we saddled up and proceeded on our way over a road which beggars description.

The warmth of the sun, together with the rest and the rough fare of the inn, had put new heart into us, and I blithely whistled a tune, unconscious of my companion until arrested by his comment.

"You're feeling better about it," he observed, grinning at me. "Admit now that you are satisfied with the night's proceedings."

"Almost," I admitted grudgingly.

"Almost! I'll swear 'tis a hard man to please! What more would you have? You saw the maid, kept your promise to her, yet in a measure fulfilled your obligation to the cause. In fact, I have

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been thinking that it was a better move than if we had taken a hostage. Ardchatten is to be trusted, for all he's a Campbell. Having given his word to protect our allies held in duress, he will be more useful to us in Edinburgh than he could be in irons."

He had managed it handsomely, I had to admit. "You did splendidly, cousin, and I am sorry for my hasty words," I said.

"Hoot!" he answered. "'Tis forgotten. Think no more of it. 'Twill not happen again. Hard knocks chip the romance off the best of men. One learns the honest value of things and yet at times is prone to lose much of the joy of living. To me a man means one to fight beside for mutual advantage, or against for my own. To you every man is to be trusted till he proves faithless. You will be scorched as I was—and it will hurt. I have been so seared that it no longer bothers me, but I trust none till they are proven. Friends I have few, nor do I want many. They are a nuisance—they are always needing something."

"Like me, for instance," I laughed.

"That's different, laddie," he said seriously. "You're a kinsman. At present I have but two or three friends. Old Baron Spatz and my foster brother, Duncan. We challenged three Polish officers and vanquished them before breakfast. The

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Marquis, who is my ideal of a gallant soldier, and who has befriended me. And you, laddie, because you were so helpless. By God we'll make a man of you yet! But not too much of my pattern. I would not wish that on you. I have had my moments; I have seen life. In the Courts of Europe, with my pockets full of gold. I have had boon companions—and titled mistresses by the score. I have known the joy of victory on a dozen stricken fields and in as many golden beds and there is no ecstasy for a man like the twain, condemn them as you will. I have known the depths of subjection and despair too, which make one value the heights. You will miss much of that. I see you rather, when this war is over, slipping easily into a comfortable middle age, with the woman of your choice beside you, adoring her as she will you, surrounded by a covey of tiny Sannochs, which you will scare off to bed at night with wild tales of Uncle Ranald. That's your horoscope!"

"How," I asked, "do you reconcile that bucolic scene with my helplessness?"

"Oh, don't misunderstand me. You will stand the test. You're helpless still because the making of you is unfinished. You'll get your maid,—you're a Sannoch—but meanwhile you need guidance."

"The prospect was none too bright when we parted," I observed bitterly.

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“Why? Because she flew off in a dudgeon as you had not told her my intent and because we bested her father? Rot! Not she! It proves you know not of the ways of women. Do you think her fighting Campbell blood would permit her tossing her heart to a namby-pamby fool? She wants a man to father her children, one that will take what he wants and hold it. 'Tis the code she understands. There are women too who like to mother men, but their lives are not healthy in the Highlands. Never fear, you have a stronger place in her affection now than you did yesterday morning. A woman—strangely enough—has the faculty of continuing to love after she loses respect, but she will not be happy doing it.”

“How about McGilvery—think you that will help my case?”

“Why not? She loathed the man. I have no doubt her father is as well pleased that he is out of the way—he’s been a scourge to the Covenanting Party, prying into everyone’s business. And combined with Ardchatten’s promise, 'tis the best stroke we could have made to safeguard the Royalist prisoners. McGilvery was shrieking to high Heaven for their blood.”

“I had not thought of that. Think you he is dead?”

“Dead as a herring,” he answered breezily. “I

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put all I had into it—and never with more satisfaction."

So we chatted along our way, and in the evening drew nigh to Blair Atholl. We secured no certain news of the Highland army. All they could say was that Montrose opposed Hurry somewhere between Inverness and Forres. With difficulty we exchanged our tired horses despite the generous offer of silver to bind the bargain, for there were no posts established on the Highland roads. Sleeping at Blair, we were off again the next morning, reaching Rothiemurchus the same night. The next day we passed through Abernethy in the afternoon and crossed the Spey some ten miles beyond, where we slept in a smithy beside the road.

To save time, we there took a course to the west of the Inverness road, over a rough track, guided by the boy of the kindly smith. It was the worst part of all our journey. Again it rained in torrents and we frequently lost the path. Hitting the road to Forres after daylight, we saw that we were in the wake of the army. The unmistakable signs were all too apparent: scattered bits of discarded equipment and dead horses lined the deeply rutted road, while corbies and ravens croaked dismally overhead.

We reached a tiny hamlet and there heard the news of Auldearn which had been fought the day

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before. Hurry's army had been all but exterminated, two thousand men, the flower of the Lowland Regular regiments had fallen as well as many of his best officers, including Sir Munro Campbell and nine nephews of the Douglas of Carver, and a Murray.

The army, we were told, had continued on towards Elgin. Waiting for no more, we paid the boy who was no longer needed and urged on our tired horses. Passing through Auldearn we witnessed the ghastly spectacle of a stricken field in all its gruesome horror. In the fierce exaltation of battle when man's passions are stoked by the flame of fear, hate and vengeance, his eyes are blinded by the lust to kill. But the aftermath, unless he is swept away from the field on the tide of battle, is like the nauseating recovery from a dreadful orgy.

The sick, sweet stench of stale blood, naked flesh turning blue, weird figures in the grotesque postures of a nightmare, fixed sightless eyes that will see no more, gazing pitifully at the sky or balefully glaring an undying hate. Such was Auldearn—the pigsties and gardens back of the village, on the awful slope where Alasdair met the brunt of Hurry's attack, was a shambles. The bodies of the slain lay in windrows, whilst from them rose swarms of blue-bottle flies and bees which had deserted their honey for a stronger diet of blood as if gone mad in a mad

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world. Some of Alasdair's wild Ulstermen were still there with their women—the ghouls, who after every engagement haunted the fields to despoil alike the dead and the dying, leaving their naked bodies to the foxes and the ravens.

They had caught up some horses of Hurry's destroyed cavalry from which we secured fresh mounts and made haste to quit the horrid scene. Night was falling when we beheld the fires of the Highland army and were challenged by the outpost.

We asked the whereabouts of Sir John Stewart, from whom we received a hearty welcome. Sitting over a cold meal washed down with raw spirits, the fine old warrior regaled us with a full account of the battle. He told how Montrose pitched his camp at the village intending to continue after the enemy in the morning. Then the harassed Hurry turned to strike like an angry beast at bay, and Alasdair hearing their coming on a wet and misty morning, spread the alarms. The Marquis brilliantly disposed his troops for battle. Discarding a centre, he gave the left to Alasdair, on the ridge back of the village, entrusting to him the Royal Standard, so that Hurry would think that he was there in person. He took personal command of the reserve infantry on Alasdair's right, where they were concealed by a ridge, hiding his cavalry, under Lord Gordon, in a hollow on the extreme left.

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Hurry drew up his army in line of battle in front of Alasdair with a bog at his back, and advanced his infantry to the attack with the mass of his cavalry held in reserve.

We heard how the gallant Alasdair, undaunted by the fact that he had but five hundred men with which to oppose five times their number, rushed to meet the advancing Lowland regiments as they emerged from the bog. Like berserks they flung themselves down the slope, howling their battle cries, swinging their claymores and lopping off heads like cabbages.

Forced back by sheer weight of numbers, his Irish and Macdonalds gave ground doggedly, retreating foot by foot up the hill, and into the enclosures of the village where they fought like madmen. Alasdair broke his great sword, but secured another from a dying clansman. Beaten to his knees, that champion sprang up again and fought on with renewed vigour, an inspiration to his followers and the terror of his foes, who gave way before the swing of his blade. One Western man, wounded a score of times, fought on with but his spiked shield, an arrow through his cheeks. Highlanders, with death wounds, battled like fiends until they dropped, then crawled about and stabbed upward with their dirks.

Meanwhile the Marquis released the reserves and

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the whole line swept down upon the doomed regiments. They died in their tracks while their infantry and cavalry reserve cravenly fled in panic, and the relentless Highland Horse pursued them for fourteen miles.

"And now," concluded St. John, "what of your own adventures?"

He listened attentively while Ranald gave him a brief account of the happenings since we quit the army at Crief. Grudgingly he admitted that if Ardchatten was to be trusted to hold his promise, it would serve as well as if we had secured a hostage, but of this he was not sure. Promising to secure us an interview with the Marquis at the earliest possible moment, he commended us to our beds.

Rolled in our plaids before the fire, we soon were asleep, nor did we awaken until a gillie came in the cold, gray dawn with our chests, which upon donning our disguise, we had left with the Appin men. Once again in the warm kilt and shawl with my bonnet on my head and the old broadsword by my side, I felt myself and Ranald smiled his understanding.

The army moved early and before evening we entered Elgin where after nightfall a messenger sought us out, saying that the Marquis desired our presence. He was in the best of spirits, for never had the cause seemed more promising. Rising, he

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greeted us warmly without a hint of dissatisfaction, bidding us be seated and tell our story.

"Sir John, here, has already given me a brief summary of your adventures among the godly folk of Auld Reekie," he said with a smile, "but I am sure that it will bear retelling in detail. I think I have earned an evening's relaxation, so let us have wine and you may amuse us with a fuller account."

Ranald warmed to the task and the tale lost nothing in his telling. Occasionally, Montrose would lean forward and inject a question, but in the main he sat back with half-shut eyes, tranquilly sipping from a leather jack. But when it came to the part which Mactavish played, he was instantly alert and shot a quick look of understanding at Sir John.

"So," he observed, "that would account for Master Mactavish not having returned from recruiting his glen. He asked leave to go to his tower to beat up the countryside the day after you left —nor have we heard of him since. No doubt he got wind of your mission from some idly wagging tongue, for I cannot think that any on my council would deliberately play us false. But this is a grave charge that you bring, Captain. The man has powerful friends—have you proof with which to face them?"

"That have I!" and reaching into a pocket, Ran-

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ald brought forth the incriminating letter to Mc-
Gilvery.

The Marquis held it to the light and scanned it rapidly. "There," he said tossing it over to Sir John, "do you know his hand?"

The laird read it carefully. "Aye, 'tis his, I make no doubt."

"Then 'tis enough to hang him! Who would think the man's personal enmity would lead him to betrayal—what reason has he, Sannoch, for so hating you?"

I told them of our grave suspicions, fostered by Cameron's disclosure of the loan from my father which David had tried to collect on the day of his death. And of the two attempts made upon my life during the Argyllshire raid.

"'Tis plausible," said the Marquis, "and I make no doubt but that had he been successful in contriving your capture and execution in Edinburgh, he would have returned brazenly to betray us further."

When Ranald had finished relating our adventures, the Marquis sat for a while in thought. I watched the play of the flickering candlelight upon his features—this man who was so young and had accomplished so much. Then, lifting his head, "On first thought it would appear that you had failed, and yet I am inclined to feel in the end it

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will turn for the best. I was prepared for failure. Foreseeing the difficulties of your undertaking—barring the best of luck—I hoped for little from this first attempt save valuable information and the laying of plans for another try. But you have uncovered Mactavish, apparently you have disposed of McGilvery, the greatest enemy of our friends in jeopardy. The Covenant will call it assassination and therein lies a danger as they may demand reprisals. Yet I know Campbell of Ardchatten to be a man of his word, and I shall rest easier for Napier and the rest. You have done well—both of you,” he added looking from one to the other. “As you have heard, Captain, we are now well equipped with horse. As a reward I will transfer those under O’Cahan to your command—he is a better leader of infantry in any case, and unschooled in the European method of cavalry attack.”

Flushed with pride, Ranald thanked him and then added that we had another plan to expound.

“Which is?”

“My lord, Glen Sannoch is in danger. Having proven our case against Mactavish, let us kill two or three birds with one stone. Give us half a troop and let us go to its rescue and, at the same time, try for the capture of him. There can be no safety for Sannoch or its laird as long as this man lives. Failing to take him at his own tower we can, at the most,

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regain the army in three weeks and bring back the Sannoch men with us. If, as I believe, we shall accomplish the destruction of Mactavish's tower, there will at least be peace for the glen—while the men are away."

Silence reigned in the room while Montrose sat weighing the matter in the balance.

"What think you, Stewart?"

"My lord, it will be a lesson to others of the villain's ilk which should be taught. And you can hardly refuse young Sannoch the favour. Furthermore, it will of a certainty result in the ultimate increase in your force by the weight of his men which, few as they be, will be welcome. And if they make good the chastising of Mactavish they should be able to leave their own glen in comparative safety with few to guard it. I say, let them go."

I thanked the laird for his support while the Marquis took a turn about the room.

"I wanted you to start training this new cavalry of Gordon's," he said to Ranald. "They behaved admirably at Auldearn, but they are raw and may not always have such rare opportunity as it afforded. Then again, I cannot spare the men you ask. Every one is important to me. Hurry is disposed of—but there is still Baillie and that braggart, Lindsey. While I hold my force I must follow them till they fight—then and not till then, is the Lowland cam-

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paign possible. Until we get into the Lowlands, these victories mean but little assistance to His Majesty."

"My lord," persisted Ranald, "three weeks are not much, and I doubt that you will fight another major engagement before that. We have heard Baillie is moving on Strathspey, and to oppose him you will have to move in the direct route from here to Sannoch. Let us continue with you and if, as is his way, he refuses battle, give us leave to go. We could regain the army in two weeks if necessary."

"So be it, then. I shall give you leave under those terms, but I cannot spare half a troop. A squad you can have fully equipped with muskets and pistols. That should sufficiently augment Sannoch's men—if they are filled with the zeal of revenge."

And so it was settled. Ranald went to work, training his cavalry while the Marquis graciously attached me to his personal staff against the time when I should again lead my men to him.

A few days later we marched out of Elgin, and went to Strathbogie, where Baillie had been raiding and burning the countryside. We succeeded in outmanœuvring him on the Spey, passing through Balveny and Glenlievat. West, we tramped to Abernethy, and Rothiemurchus, drawing ever nearer to Atholl. Baillie withdrew to Inverness, to secure supplies which left the road open to face

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Lindsey in Atholl, but the news of our coming was sufficient to send him scuttling back into Angus.

The Marquis prepared to turn west again into Glen Muick, and he sent for us saying that since he despaired of drawing Lindsey into battle, we might take the opportunity while so near home to settle our accounts and rejoin him as soon as we were able.

CHAPTER XIII

Sannoch Again

RANALD chose his men with care, eight stalwart fellows who had been under his eye. He conned their equipment with the discernment of the veteran commander and, tossing the corporal a silver shilling, bade him take them for a tankard, the better to start our expedition auspiciously.

We trooped off two by two, riding at a slow, but steady pace until well past noon, when we unsaddled beside a stream to let the horses feed and rest, then on again into the quiet twilight. The evening was still and, save for the creak of leather, the scuff of the horses' hooves on the soft road and the occasional lowing of distant cattle, no sound caught our ears.

Late in the night we reached Blair Atholl, having made thirty-six miles in some eighteen hours. Anxious as I was to reach Sannoch with all possible speed, I questioned Ranald as to the need for setting such a pace, for I knew that after such a long

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march neither man nor beast would be fit the following morning.

He explained that he intended timing his start so that we would approach the glen from the south-east late in the afternoon, to have plenty of time in the late evening to scout the country before approaching the tower. On the one hand, if Mac-tavish had invested the old place, there would be less chance of our being surprised, and more of surprising them. And if they had already taken the tower and departed, or been beaten off, it was quite likely—in fact, almost a certainty—that so experienced a raider would leave one or two hidden to give warning of our coming.

The following morning, after a careful inspection, we continued on our way. Being near home I discarded my nag and the detestable breeks for the comfort of my kilt and continued afoot in the capacity of guide.

We crossed the shoulder of Schiehallion, grim sentinel of the Highlands, and continued south-westerly towards the Lyon with Loch Tay agleam in the distance. No living thing came under our eyes in the lonesome heather save an occasional band of hinds or the grouse which we scared up in our path.

Unobserved by any of the Glen Lyon folk, we cautiously approached the braes of Sannoch, and in

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the dusk looked down from a high place at the sturdy tower which had protected my forefathers for three centuries.

Hiding the little troop in a bracken clad dell some distance from the tower, I stole alone over a cow-path to the valley to scout the way in. Approaching a hillside croft, my nose arrested me and I stood like a stag to sniff the air. There was smoke in it, that I knew, and a chill premonition of evil swept over me. Had we come too late? I stood and listened; nothing broke the stillness but the plaintive wail of plover in the valley and the rustle of the ever-restive birches.

Creeping forward in the gathering gloom, I saw that the wee croft was deserted and boldly strode to it. The gutted walls were all that remained, from which an acrid smoke still emerged. Fragments of broken crockery, a child's doll, and bits of the shattered furniture of the unfortunate inhabitants littered the ground. Even the haycock had been fired. But, cast about me as I would, there was no evidence of strife, which argued that the occupants had had timely warning and escaped to the Hold.

Returning, I described what I had discovered and we proceeded more boldly. The little hamlet, which nestled in the glen below the tower, was in the same desolate state, empty and silent. Houses in ruin—their walls blackened and crumbling; gardens trod-

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den under and fruit trees girdled. The sties and byres were empty. Everything which could walk had been driven off by the marauders, save a wary shepherd dog which barked its warning from a safe distance. Gazing about me, appalled by the havoc, I realized that Sannoch was faced with ruin. It had taken years, under the kindly patronage of my father, to build up from the ancient feudal system of the glens that which, in a single night, had been swept away by the ruthless hand of Mactavish.

I contemplated the cruel misery of the coming winter with impotent tears in my eyes. Rooftrees gone; crops despoiled; no wool for clothing; no milk or porridge for crying bairns. And slowly my feeling of self-pity and commiseration for the plight of my poor people changed. Something came over me that I had never known before. The blood rushed to my brain; a fierce rage shook me. I felt that I could beat in Mactavish's door with my fists and throttle him barehanded. Unconsciously I grasped my dirk and whispered hoarsely to the heavens.

"Christ! They shall pay! For every life I shall have two—and for every blackened rooftree! They think this waste—they'll see waste! There's no room in these glens for a Mactavish and a Sannoch both. Their valleys will so stink with their rotten gore that not even their own vile nostrils will stand the stench!!"

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I heard Ranald's hard laugh beside me.

"Good! I have waited long for this. Now you are ready, Sannoch, to face your man. I taught you all I could of fence, but you were not prepared; you had not in you the urge to kill, just a boyish petulance. Now, you can take on Mactavish where and when you will and as sure as the sun rises you will spit him like a capon! He has made you suffer and you are a man at last."

"You will bear with me till 'tis done?"

"Bear with you? For what did I come? Have I not said we are bound together by more than kinship? And there is no more willing helper at the grindstone than one with his own knife to sharpen. You say there is no place for a Mactavish on your borders. To that I agree—and methinks there will be little warmth in my welcome from Seaforth when I return. In a few years I will be getting over-stiff for the saddle, my sword will sell cheaper, women will be more difficult and armed camps but chill comfort. What better than that I could carve out a new home for my Ronan men adjoining you, with a safe resting place for my old age?"

"None better!" I cried.

"Good! Then, 'tis as well as done, save for a few sharp blows. Your hand on it, laddie—we're neighbours now!"

I grasped a stirrup the better to reach the Hold

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quickly and at a canter we left the village and turned right through a grove of ancient beeches which obscured the pleasure before the tower. A burn ran through the centre of it and the clatter of our horses as we crossed the tiny bridge aroused the watchers on the parapet. There was a roar and a slug sang viciously overhead.

Running forward I made myself known, crying to them to desist. In answer there was a cheer. We saw a light appear in some upper loopholes and, with a clatter and bang, the sturdy little door opened and Dougal rushed out. Tears running down his rugged cheeks, he clutched me in his great paws and crushed me to his breast like a bear.

“Ah kenned you’d come,” he cried. “Ah ne’er dooted it, whatever.”

Then abashed at his impetuosity, he stepped back, passed a fist across his face and with dignity greeted the smiling Ranald. Men, women, and children swarmed out of the tiny door, stumbling over yapping dogs and bleating sheep which followed them, laughing, crying, cheering, “Ta laird is hame!” crowding about the troopers to greet them like long lost brothers.

As we entered the old hall I was astounded. I had never seen the clansmen come in for refuge, though my father had twice in his time and God knows how many times it had happened before. The

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sparse furniture of the place was stacked in a corner and all the rest of the wall space lined with closely packed cattle, with here and there a horse or an ass amongst them. Sheep and hogs were everywhere and, on the backs of the patient cattle roosted the fowl. In the rear of the place was a high walled enclosure flanked by a wing of the tower which formed a shallow ell. Into this the horses were led and as we entered the hold, the door was slammed to and the heavy bars reset.

Torches were lighted and set in brackets upon the wall and we sat down to a hearty meal while the wondering cattle gazed at us out of mildly startled eyes. A cask of old spirits was brought up from below so that all might fittingly toast our welcome and then Dougal gave us an account of the raid.

Jock had reached Sannoch some three days after he left us and immediately warning was sent to the countryside. Much of the clansmen's meagre possessions were brought in and the enclosure filled with cattle while the rest of the beasts were herded near the tower for safety. Nothing further happened and, despite Dougal's advice, many of them wished to return to tend their crops. A week passed and the murmuring grew apace. So posting some lads in the surrounding hills to give warning of the approach of any considerable body, he let half go

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home, keeping the rest to garrison the tower until those released returned to relieve them. Another week passed and the men grew impatient of the restraint. Then suddenly the blow struck. In the grey dawn, a lad came running into the village, screaming that raiders were on his heels. Those in the village caught up their little ones and ran for the Hold where a great smoke was made on the battlement to warn the outlying crofts. Rory Oig gathered a few with firelocks to go forward and hold up the raiders, while the rest ran to bring the pastured sheep and cattle in. Rory's party fired a volley which momentarily checked the advance but was forced to fall back in face of the greater numbers. From the battlement the frightened tenants watched the burning of their village. In a few hours it was a smouldering heap of coals. Then, one by one, columns of smoke rose to the sky from the outlying steading, amidst wails of anguish from the poor people who saw their years of toil and effort disappear before their eyes.

Dougal went on to tell how they heard shots in the distance and from the east battlement saw Hector Maclean, with his wife and two tots, racing over the brae toward the Hold, half a dozen of Mactavish's clansmen in hot pursuit. The woman faltered and Hector turned to face the foe. He fired a pistol, and one rolled down the hillside, then

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drawing his claymore, he swung and cut down another and fell beneath a smother of blows while his wife and children were slaughtered before the eyes of the horrified audience on the tower.

“Were there any more taken?” I asked and I did not know my own voice—it seemed strange and far away.

“None that we ken, though there are three families out. ‘Tis thought that they wisely took to the hills and are still afeared to come in.”

“How many fighting men do you muster,” asked Ranald, “counting all but lads too young and those beyond use?”

“A score and two, counting your man Jock.”

“And we bring nine — with ourselves it’s eleven —thirty-three in all. How many estimate you had Mactavish?”

“A score more, at least.”

“So strong! Were they all Mactavish’s? I knew not he could muster so many.”

“No,” said Dougal, with a shake of his head. “They were no’ all of his accursed crew; some Menzies joined them—that I would swear to.”

“So, they would take you between the upper and the nether millstone, would they, but are you sure?”

“I am certain,” I said, breaking into the conversation, “Mactavish musters but few, if any more than

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we can. Therefore, if, as Dougal says, there were more than thirty odd, he had assistance—either they were Covenanter men which he brought with him, as we did our troopers, or he had assistance from nearby and I can think of no one that would join him against us, unless it were the Menzies.

“Aye,” said Rory, breaking in. “They must ha’ been Menzies, as the laird says. Mactavish has no’ so many. We dinna’ countet them, but there were close to threescore, including those which fell.”

“Say you they attacked the tower?”

“Ah, weel, they no attacket, so ta speak, but they came up wi’ bra show of force after they burned the countryside and demanded the surrender of the tower in the name of Estates, bidding the laird show himself on the wall. Dougal told ’em he’d parley for ye as they were beneath a Sannoch’s notice. They brought up a tree then to beat in the door, but a volley fra’ the wall laid out a brace and Dougal hurled down a great stane which got one or more and they beat a hasty retreat. So with the twa which Hector got, poor laddie, there is five or six of them killed or wounded.”

“Hum,” said Ranald. “This is food for thought. Two courses lie open to us, one to follow them up now and trust to surprise. They will not expect quick retaliation, for they’ll naturally argue if

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strong enough to raid into their glens you would have sallied forth to save your own. It has also this in its favour: they do not know that you were strengthened by the troopers, and undoubtedly their Menzies have gone home!"

"Aye," nodded Dougal.

"On the other hand, you can bide your time. Give me a fortnight to ride north into my own country and I promise to return with a score of stout lads of Dougal's breed and we'll sweep the country of them."

"We promised to regain the Army in two weeks," I reminded him.

"True, we did, but the Marquis never anticipated this—and if the shilly-shallying Menzies are at last showing their hand, he will forgive the delay if we offer them just chastisement."

"What is it ye propose to do?" growled Dougal. "The advice is guid either way, dependin' on yer intent. Do ye aim to root out the deils once and for all? If the former it is, we hae enough, but if 'tis as it should be, let us wait an' do it right, for we need more men."

I stepped into the centre of the circle before the blaze and faced them. Something told me that the time had come to show my mettle and really assume the leadership of the little clan. That something whispered that they waited to hear me declare my-

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self and that upon the decision rested the force of my leadership for all time.

"Men of Sannoch, this is our battle. Our forefathers, yours and mine, held these glens, and if we deserve them we need no help."

A howl went up from the pack, but quickly subsided as I held aloft a hand for quiet. A little sea of faces glared up fiercely happy into mine. Men growled their approval, nodding and slapping each other on the back.

"We are few, aye. But we are right. You who followed the gallant Montrose last winter saw him menaced from three sides, by forces each of which was stronger than his own. Did he falter? What you helped him do at Inverary, you can do again for Sannoch. We'll start in the morning. If we come limping home, it will be time enough to look to Captain Mackenzie for aid."

Midst the acclaim of my followers I looked at him, to see how he had taken this refusal of his proffer, fearful that his thin skin, which he had thought so thick, might have again been bruised. But he nodded his approval and fought his way through the press to take my hand that all might see, whispering, "Now, Sannoch, you are acting like a leader."

The hall was the scene of wild enthusiasm in which the women joined as readily as the men. An

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ancient crone, toothless and bent, threw back her head and screamed curses on Mactavish and all his brood.

“Who is she?” asked Ranald. “A Maclean, you say. She has cause, God wot!”

Old Angus secured his pipes, and the pibroch skirled through the rafters as it had periodically for centuries. Men, wild with drink and hysteria, danced and sang and yelled. The place was like a madhouse. Grimly complacent, I gazed upon the uproar, the thought crossing my mind that I who had been taught by my mother that this clannish warfare was the root of all Scotland’s sorrow, had whipped into flame the embers of hate. Then came a picture of the Macleans fleeing to the tower, of David’s body stark upon the lonely moor, of the cruel raids of my father’s younger days, which had sapped the man power of our glen, and I knew that, right or wrong, it must be Sannoch first, if we were to survive.

“You are satisfied with your work?” I turned to find Ranald observing me and as usual he had read my thoughts.

“I am,” I answered with finality.

“You have weighed the results? You will go through with it—there can be no halfway measure, you know, or it were far better that you did not start.”

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"I shall go through with it—I have but one regret—the necessity."

"Good!" he answered. "And now to business."

Mixing with the crowd he singled out some of the most dependable to pursue certain tasks. For there was much to be done; food was to be prepared and bullets run, powder flasks filled, claymores and axes to be ground. And in the early morning, midst the tears and cheers of the valiant womenfolk, the little band sallied forth and took the road to retribution.

Old Angus, strutting like a capercailzie, led with his pipes. Then came the clansmen followed by Ranald and the horse. I walked by his stirrup for a ways, before taking my place in the lead.

"How," I asked, "think you the troopers fared?" I was anxious that there should be the warmest feeling between our Lowland allies and the clan, for our Highland people took a bit of knowing.

"Oh, excellently!" he laughed. "In fact, from what I saw last night, I would not be surprised if there were a new crop of bairns upon the braes of Sannoch in the spring—wearing wee cavalry boots and tiny sabres."

"After all, why not," I answered more to myself. "What else have the poor creatures to offer but a moment's joy and the ability to propagate the species of their protectors?"

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“Nothing—it is as it should be—’tis the soldier’s prize since the days of Mars. But your reconciliation to it, laddie, is a sign that you have passed another milestone on the path of life.” And he bent down to poke me in the ribs.

As we neared the marches of our land, four picked bowmen went ahead to scout the way and silently dispose of any watchers left by the raiders to give warning of pursuit on their back track.

Later, our progress was arrested by a signal from the stalkers to stop and one of them ran back to report that a sentinel had been spied upon a high place which commanded our approach. While we rested in the shadow of a small wood, the cavalcade came up—which, for better concealment, had kept well to the rear. After a consultation it was decided that they should make a wide detour, to take the peak from the rear, and that giving them time to encircle it, the stalkers would then openly advance and drive the watchers into their hands.

We gave the troopers two hours to accomplish the detour and the bowmen again advanced. We could not see what occurred, but when the cavalry rode back and took up their accustomed place behind us, they reported two raiders the less.

At long last we looked down into the glen. Along the hillsides the smoke rose lazily from the croft where the evening meal was preparing just as it

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had at Sannoch before their torches laid it low. In the middle distance lay the village, a munificent sun casting its blessing upon it as it had upon ours, but my heart was hard.

“Shall we attack now?” I asked Ranald. He laughed scornfully.

“No, Captain Impetuous, we’ll do no such thing. We will slip back quietly to yonder woods, which we should not have left had I known we approached so near. There, we will bivouac till dawn. And not a fire is to be lighted, mind, nor anyone stray from its cover.”

Finding a likely place under the great firs beside a brook we sat down together to a cold meal. Ranald called Dougal to him and bade him send men back to the spying place to handle any who might be sent to relieve the watches we had disposed of.

Then with Rory Oig and Dougal we held a council of war. Ranald explained that it would have been a grave mistake to show ourselves that evening as there would have been insufficient light in which to do the task well. The old warrior nodded in obvious agreement.

“Furthermore,” he continued, “I have a plan: last night the laird referred to Montrose at Inverary. Let us now apply his strategy at Auldearn to our case. We know that we are outnumbered some two to one, yet we hold an ace—the troopers of which

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they know nothing and will expect less. Properly handled they may well turn the tide in our favour. To be honest with you, had it not been for them and the thought of this plan, I would not have lent myself to your laird's decision to attack before I brought you reinforcements.

"At dawn divide your force into two parts. You, Rory, command one, and Dougal, you take the other with your chief. Swiftly gobble up the nearby steadings, but lose no time doing it. Your aim is the village. Join there and strike swiftly. You should have at the most an hour before the defenders arm and sally forth to the rescue. Then you will be outnumbered despite what inroads you have made upon the village. Immediately you see them emerge from the tower, fall back rapidly towards these woods—time your flight so that they will catch up with you just at the summit of the path. I shall hold the horsemen here under cover of the woods. 'Tis but two hundred paces to where you will make your stand. The turf here is hard and dry, with sufficient room to form the troopers and charge. Face slightly north, so they will not see us until we are upon them. Then, when they think they have you, we will take them in the flank and—as at Auldearn—methinks we can ride them down.

"And now," concluded Ranald, "you, Dougal,

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and Rory, return to the men and explain the plan, for it is best, in a small force such as ours, that everyone should be fully informed of his part.” And drawing out his pipe, he sat smoking in the long summer twilight as if he had naught to do on the morrow but catch a trout for his breakfast.

CHAPTER XIV

The Vengeance

DOUGAL leaned over and shook me. Chilled through, I cast aside my plaid and stood up stiffly.

“Come,” he said, “ ‘Tis time we were awa’.”

The men were already gathered. None had eaten —none wanted to eat; an empty belly was better for such work as we had to do. I wondered how many would breakfast when the bloody work was done and shivered, more from excitement than the cold.

A soft grey light covered the heather. Stars still twinkled brightly overhead and a drenching dew lay upon the ground. The troopers were bringing in their mounts, picketed throughout the night to gain such grazing as they could. A horse coughed and, resenting such early disturbance, an old cock grouse sounded his challenge.

The band split in two. I went off to the right with Dougal by my side, his great axe over his shoulder. Red Wallace and tall young Colin, my leine-chrion, fell in behind, and the rest followed

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as we skirted the edge of the moor. All firearms had been left behind at the rallying place—primed, ready and covered with plaids. Death stalked silently in the glen, the Lochaber and claymore being his attendants.

Stealthily we approached the nearest croft, still peacably asleep. A sharp spear of light, yellow as molten gold, crept over the western peaks. A cock crew. Dougal stepped to the door. His axe swung aloft and fell with a crash. Another blow and, the door riven at the hinges, was pried loose by the clansmen who swarmed in. A shrill scream, muffled curses and the sound of scuffling, then they emerged again, dragging the women and children who stood clutching each other in silent, wide-eyed terror. Someone ran out with a torch, lighted on the smouldering hearth, and set it to the thatch. Others sped on to the next croft. I shall pass over the rest of this horrid scene. Let it suffice that when we reached the village there was a wake of ruin behind us.

Some of the inhabitants, taking early alarm, roused others and made off to the Hold, but several tardy ones were caught and went down fighting desperately with their backs to their walls. Meanwhile the torch was busy and a thick pall rose to soil the dawn.

Dougal stood in the centre of the single street, a

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ruddy symbol of hate, shouting directions, but with one eye ever on the tower half a mile away. As the roofs blazed higher, we saw a dark mass emerge from it, with here and there a glint of steel, catching the reflection of our fires. Promptly I sounded my horn to which the men rallied and in a body we retreated towards the high ground from whence we had come.

Those who escaped from the village had greatly augmented the force in the tower, so that it was easy to see in the morning light that we were out-numbered two to one. They came on rapidly, urged by two mounted men. One of them on a white horse appeared to be Mactavish.

The distance between the two forces was rapidly closing. Taking in the situation with the cool, appraising eye of the veteran raider, Dougal pressed our retreat to greater speed. Yet when finally we gained the summit and uncovered the weapons, the enemy were less than a furlong behind, shouting and brandishing their weapons. Seeing us turn at bay, their leader paused and formed his men in battle array, a long line two deep with the tips well forward so that they appeared like a shallow crescent. Dougal placed me in the centre, with his most stalwart swordsmen on the wings to prevent flanking, the greatest danger from their longer front.

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Suddenly with a fierce Highland yell they bore down upon us. I glanced towards the woods, but there was no sign of Ranald.

“Give the word,” shouted Dougal.

A withering volley took them by surprise, but they came on unchecked. Crying “*Sannoch*,” I sprang forward. The shooters dropped their firelocks and took to their swords, as a man they dashed forward to meet the foe. There was a crash as the two lines struck, with shouting and cursing. Engraved on my memory is a nightmare of panting, sweating, fiercely set white faces struggling silently save for the quick catch of breath and the clang of steel.

I cut at an opponent who caught the blow on his targe and thrust viciously in return. As I countered with a riposte, mighty Dougal who had disposed of his man, swung a back-hander and my adversary disappeared in the mêlée.

The man on the white horse again appeared riding behind his line. It was Mactavish, who pointed his sword at me and bellowed instructions to his followers. The leine-chrion drew so close about me that I could not wield my sword: claymore to right and Lochaber to left, cutting a swath through our enemies and keeping it cleared about us. Mactavish, standing in his stirrups, aimed a pistol, and as I ducked and threw up my targe, the

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bullet crashed into it. The next moment a claymore descended, cutting deep into its tough rim, but before the wielder could free his blade, I thrust upward into his bowels, and with a scream, he dropped as Dougal snatched me back from the press. For a moment we were free.

They pressed us hard. We were retreating slowly. Borne back by sheer weight of numbers, the last of our little clan, which had once held its head so high, was fighting like a band of champions. But the odds were too great. Here were no Lowland levies who would turn and flee at the first Highland yell, but clansmen like ourselves, who could fight valiantly, however vile their cause.

Had we been alone, Sannoch would have gone down forever in those few awful minutes at the head of the glen. But suddenly there was a shrill cheer, and with a thunder of hoofs the squad of cavalry bore down upon their flank. A less skilful commander would have taken them full in the rear and gone through us both, but Ranald had learned the handling of Horse under the finest commander of Europe. Leaning forward in their stirrups, his troopers hit the flank and flung it back on their centre. Startled, they hesitated and we came at them with renewed vigour, whilst the horsemen, veterans of Fyvie and Auldearn, laid about them on all sides. Led by Dougal, his axe rising and falling, and the

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fanatical Rory Oig, shrieking like a fiend, with tears streaming down his ghastly face as he performed prodigies of valour, we broke through their centre. The survivors, scattering like partridge, broke and ran in every direction.

Mactavish turned to ride away and Ranald spurred to intercept him. The villain drew another pistol and, coolly waiting until his opponent was almost at swordspoint, shot his mount full in the head. As the poor brute reared, Ranald nimbly threw himself clear, and, as he sprang to his feet, Mactavish galloped after his companion who had already quit the field. Here and there his clansmen continued to fight in twos and threes asking no quarter and expecting none.

Ranald ran towards me. "Quick!" he cried, "gather some men and make for the tower. If the devils get there before us, we will never dislodge them."

Colin and Wallace were still by me, sticking like leeches. Calling to others, we raced down the glen, as Ranald turned back to secure a horse and collect his troopers. Overtaking us before we reached the blazing village, they thundered by and when we reached the tower, panting for breath, they were sitting their blown horses before its stout door.

Said Ranald, "The old fox was too smart to go to ground in a blank earth, from which we might draw

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him. Had he left a garrison here, he could have held the place despite our best efforts, without siege artillery, but he took all in your pursuit—confident in his ability to exterminate you. And when we cut off their retreat from the field, he knew that the jig was up."

They told how Mactavish had distanced them, and drawing rein before his tower, sat looking back towards the hills, where he had deserted his men. Well he knew, as Ranald said, that the jig was up, and I could imagine the hell of passion raging in his black heart when he realised that at long last his evil scheming had gone astray.

They said he sat his restive white horse under the walls of his aerie, until, apprehensive of the approach of Ranald's horsemen his companion laid hand upon his rein and sought to move him. Then, with a last look at its walls and an angry gesture, he turned and they galloped off, to disappear in the west.

The clansmen followed us slowly and, borrowing a horse, I left Ranald to watch the tower and retraced my steps through the village to hurry them, knowing well that the stragglers would stop to pillage and, with their blood up, would be in no mood to desist for anyone but me.

Trotting through the gutted town, with something akin to the feeling of a conquering hero, I was arrested by a woman keening beside the road.

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She was a handsome wench of the Highland breed, and she sat against the wall of a still smouldering hovel with the head of a fallen warrior in her lap. Her long, black hair hung over her face so that I could not see it until, hearing my horse stop beside her, she looked up and glared balefully at me, her fierce eyes venomous as those of an aroused beast.

The man was quite dead. There was a great cleft in the side of his pate. Foolishly I told her so, whereupon she stood up. Colin, who had followed me, realising what was to come, crossed himself as if to ward off an evil spell. He sought to lead my horse away but I shook him off. I was in no mood to be frightened by curses that day. Raising her arms, she called down the malediction of heaven, she cursed me, cursed my unborn children and all that came before me in a manner which, at another time, would have sent me shuddering upon my way. But I knew that the unhappy women of Sannoch had done the same in the past and, driving her curses from my mind, continued on my quest.

I met Dougal and Rory Oig bringing on the ruck, who carried rough litters. Four of the clansmen and one trooper had been killed, not to speak of three others sore wounded. Almost every one bore some manner of flesh wound as mute testimony to his part in the strife. But most of the injuries were of a superficial nature to which those hardened warriors

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were inured. The MacNeal sept had suffered badly, John had been killed and his brother lay groaning on a litter from a terrible wound in his neck. It was plain that little could be done for him and that his time was short.

I asked Dougal how many of our adversaries had been accounted for, but he shook his head.

"Ah have no' the tally yet, but mon, it was a bonnie fit! 'Twas better tha' Inverlochy. A score and more they left upon the field before they fled, which does not account for those overtaken in the early surprise. The Mactavish will never recover from this blow—they're done—finished, or at least, soon will be!"

When I told him of the chief's escape, he shook his head ruefully. "Him we must get and will—but he must be saved for you!"

Reaching the tower, we found Ranald in a thundering temper. During the flight, many of the women and children had taken refuge within its walls. The troopers had hammered on the stout door and demanded admittance, but the only answer had been a glimpse of fugitive faces peering from the crenelations in the parapet. At last, he ordered the troopers to cut down a tree and batter it in and just as we came up proceeded to the attack. At the second or third stroke of the ram, they dropped it and scattered with cries of rage, for a cauldron of

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boiling water was emptied on them from the battlement. And, were it not for the height which dispersed the contents over a considerable area, many of them would have been severely scalded. The clansmen thought it a huge joke and roared at the discomfiture of the attackers until fearing a brawl, I bade them desist. At Ranald's suggestion I called to the inmates, saying that we came not to war upon women and children and that if they would open the door and depart, we would promise them safe conduct. But that if they persisted in resisting, we would surely batter down the door and I would wash my hands of them and not be responsible for the action of my men.

I could see no one while addressing them, but had no doubt but that they were listening attentively. After a considerable wait, a woman thrust her head over the parapet and said they would come out, if I would swear on my knife that they would not be harmed. This I did, and a few moments later, the ponderous door creaked and slowly opened. Timorously they came forth, a pitiful group, some looking straight ahead or at the ground as if afraid we had the evil eye. Others, heads up, gazed balefully at us and one fury stood and cursed us till some of the men turned away, nor did she stop until Dougal strode at her and bade her "Shut her clap, or oath or no oath he would slit her wesand,"

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whereupon she followed the others, muttering to herself.

Suddenly, Dougal who watched closely, reached forward a brawny red arm, and plucked a little man from their midst.

“Where go you?” he growled. “Safe conduct the laird has promised for the women and children, but he said naught of men. You bide here.”

The fugitive was old and bent, crippled with rheumatism, and lay fearfully where the giant had flung him. Bidding him get up and follow, we entered the tower and stood at gaze. The place was much like Sannoch in architecture, though lacking the great portcullis. Still, one or two stalwart men could have held the narrow door or the stairs from a host.

We drew a settle before the fire that blazed upon the hearth, and sat down, calling the craven caretaker to us. To Ranald’s question he answered that he was Malcolm Mactavish, a distant kinsman of the laird.

“What is your station?”

“I am the factor.”

“So! Can you write?”

“Aye.”

“Where are Mactavish’s private quarters?”

He glanced towards the winding stairs and nodded.

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“You know where he keeps his personal papers, his money, his valuables?”

The factor shook his head.

“Speak up, or by God we’ll make you.”

“There is an iron bound chest in his room.”

“And you have the key?”

Again he shook his head.

“Now,” said Ranald, striding towards him, “where is his real hiding place?”

The man was silent.

“Speak up, you—if you don’t we’ll flay you alive!” And he caught the wretch by the neck and shook him till his teeth rattled, then flung him to the flags. The man lay silently at his feet, a hand raised to protect his head, and swore that he knew not of such a place.

“Aye! But there is such, isn’t there? You may as well admit it—you will never see your bastardly kinsman again, so if you’re wise, you will save your hide.” But the factor continued to insist that he knew not, which I was inclined to believe.

“Bah!” scoffed Ranald. “Take him away, someone, and keep an eye on him till we are through. Have him show you the wine cellar and the larder that we may eat.”

Dougal came with a tally of the dead on the field and those accounted for in the village, amounting to twenty-nine, and added significantly, “There were no wounded or prisoners.”

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We then cared in a rough way for our own who required attention and after hastily breaking our fast, the able men were divided into two parties, leaving the rest in charge of the Hold, satisfied that they could cope with any abortive attempt to recapture it by the survivors. Thanking them for their prowess and bidding them not to forget those left behind, I abandoned them to pillage. All the spoils were theirs, I told them—I wanted nothing other than my cattle and the chief's share of those belonging to Mactavish. In return, they were to spare nothing; not a roof was to be left unburned, not a tree ungirdled, the very cats and dogs were to be killed and tossed into the wells. Thus would Mactavish learn what laying waste really meant, and it would be a warning to any other that had lent him a hand.

Eagerly they hurried off and I returned to the Hold having no heart for their work, necessary to our existence as I knew it to be.

The hall held little of interest, there were but few rude pieces of furniture, and the walls were bare save for old arms and trophies of the chase.

Mounting the circular stairs, I entered the room above. It was a large chamber similar to most of its kind, lighted by a single narrow window, trans-fixed by a stout iron bar. Set diagonally in a far corner was a small fireplace containing some blackened logs. There was a huge bed in the centre,

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a couple of stools, a long table on which stood a tallow dip and an oaken chest. On one of the walls hung a moth-eaten tapestry; there were a few articles of apparel on another. Beyond the bed was a small door behind which stairs led to the floor above. The chamber had a musty, unused smell that suggested Mactavish was seldom at home. Cobwebs hung on everything and the floor was thick with dust.

Calling for assistance from below, I broke into the chest, but found nothing of interest, articles of wearing apparel, obviously belonging to Mac-tavish and some arms which the men promptly appropriated. Then Colin who had stayed by me discovered a heavy iron chest beneath the bed and drew it forth. With an iron bar we smashed the ponderous locks and pried up the lid. In it we found a deerskin bag containing some hundred pounds, Scot, a couple of valuable silver tankards and an ancient knife of rare design. There were also a mass of papers and parchments and lastly a Gaelic Bible containing many family records. I gave the men the money and other things of value and sat me down at the table to peruse the papers, using the old knife to cut the binding tapes.

Some of them were receipts for loans and the sale of cattle, old deeds and a map of the lands. Then came a sheaf of correspondence with the Cov-

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enanders, all antedating his joining Montrose, but apparently nothing of an incriminating nature. Nevertheless, I stuffed them into my shirt to con again. The chest had disclosed nothing of account, no reference to my family or to dealings with my murdered brother. Obviously there was some secret place of concealment, but how were we to find it?

Using the iron bar I sounded every flagstone in the floor, paying particular attention to the fireplace and hearth, but no welcome echo answered my blows. I tried to move the bed also, but it was too heavy. So I went about the walls tapping every foot of them as high as I could reach—the result was the same.

When I had satisfied myself the room contained nothing, I mounted the stairs to the floor above. This proved to be a storeroom containing a barrel of gunpowder, old saddlery, bags of grain and odds and ends of discarded furniture. Rats squeaked and scuttled about in the litter and reflecting their squeaking would soon be over, I climbed the last stair to the battlement. The day was about done and through the smoke which hung over the glen I saw the wrecking parties returning, backs bent to the loads they carried, driving a great herd of cattle and sheep before them. Deep in my heart I could not be proud of my deed, but I had the satisfaction of knowing that they would sing of it beside the

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hearths of Sannoch long after I was gone. The fight itself I would always remember, with head high, but that it should be attended by this ruin and misery for the innocent was a different side, less easy to condone. And yet, how different? How innocent were they? The very babes were suckled at the breasts of women who would with joy drive a knife into my vitals—the children would assist in the slaughter of my wounded men below. Had done so in the past and would again. It was the law of the land, and would go on until, like the wearing of water upon a stone, the ignorance which engendered pride, hatred, and intolerance disappeared from the land. Scotland had far to go before she was prepared for better days.



CHAPTER XV



The Secret of the Tower

GREAT was the revelry that night within the hoary walls of Mactavish's tower. Midst the murky glare of many torches, the horns went round and round again, while the warriors sang their songs and Angus skirled his pipes. A guard had been placed on the battlement, and the strong door barred, but the rest I gave their well-earned way. Ranald lay back in a chair, his boots stretched to the hearth, deep in his cups, but still imbibing from one of Mactavish's silver tankards which he had appropriated as his own.

One by one the revellers slipped under the trestle table or staggered off to find a couch. The place stank of stale breath and vomit, and I took myself again to the roof where I talked to the watchers and looked at the stars still twinkling cleanly as they had for eons of time, while my thoughts drifted to Ellen, and what she would think of my victory. For well I knew that the news of it would travel through the western Highlands like a moor fire.

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Eventually I sought the room below. Ranald had already found the bed and lay asprawl, snoring loudly. The place was hot and fetid and slumber would not come. I tossed about, my mind brightly alert. The wild ecstasy of the battle and the terrible reaction of the aftermath flitted across my tired brain.

Suddenly I heard a faint cry, and a sound as of scuffling about below. I started up, about to rise, and then thought that it was probably but one of the drunkards wandering about or having a nightmare and laid me down again.

But an insistent premonition of momentous happenings obsessed me and urged me to get up. I tried to laugh at my nerves, but unable to stand it longer, I flung off the plaid impatiently and arose.

Going to the head of the stairs, I stood listening for a moment. Everything was quiet and as dark as pitch as I crept below in my stockinginged feet. Except for a faint glow from the dying embers on the hearth, all about me was black. I heard nothing but the heavy breathing of slumbering clansmen.

Then, faint but distinct, came a strangled cry, as of some one in mortal fear and agony, and my flesh crept. Instinctively I reached for the sgian dhu in my stocking. Silence reigned in the hall and then I heard it again, a moaning cry of utter misery and pain. This time my ears were attuned to catch it

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and I thought it came from beyond the hall. Groping my way through the sleepers and the litter, I made my way to the passage, and again listened. For a third time I heard that strangled cry; it seemed to swell up from below. Swiftly returning to the fire, I found a faggot still aglow, and blew it into flame. Then back through the passage I made my way down to a large room evidently the kitchen. Listening I heard a faint murmur and the clink of metal from the direction I had come and I saw that I had walked past a narrow door which stood ajar. Beyond it a steep flight of steps wound down into the bowels of the tower. A ruddy glare suffused the damp wall of the stair passage and knowing that whatever devil's work was being done was below, I laid down the faggot and, dirk in hand, silently descended.

The sight which met my eyes as I reached the bottom and turned a corner was so surprising that I stood stock still. The cellar was a huge, low vaulted room. In the centre of it stood Dougal looking down at a form lying bound at his feet, that writhed and groaned piteously. Rory Oig stood on the other side of a log to which their victim was bound, bending over a hot coal fire, the glow from which reflected fiendishly upon the faces of my henchmen and cast grotesque goblin-like shadows upon the wall. Dougal was in the act of lifting the bound

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man into a sitting position as I stepped forward.

"In the name of all the fiends, what devil's work is this?" I cried.

Startled, the men spun around, hands to their dirks, but Dougal immediately resumed his composure.

"You are just in time," he said. "This swine has confessed."

Looking down, I saw that their captive was the crippled factor. Great beads of sweat stood upon his brow and he squirmed and moaned as he stared fearfully from one to the other.

"What do you mean by such work? The man's a cripple!"

"Aye," said Dougal easily, "and like all of them has the greater fortitude. We nearly had to burn the hide off his feet before he would talk—but he talked! Didn't you—you misbegotten oaf! Don't be taken in, Sannoch, by his piteous look and bent body. He would stick a dirk between your ribs soon enough if he had the chance. Aye! And had the knife concealed upon him when we caught him."

"How mean you, caught him? The man was locked up as ordered, was he not?"

"Aye. He was locked in here, where we threw him, but there is some way out which we dinna' find yet. I was restless—what with the wine and the heat and excitement I couldna' sleep. As I lay on

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the settle, in the hall, I saw a misshapen figure cross in front of the fire on the hearth—something in the shape of it told me that it was this devil, though I locked him in with my own hands. As I sprang up and grabbed him he drew his dirk on me, but I caught his wrist in time."

"So that was the scuffle I heard!"

"Na doubt—I dragged him out to the kitchen, bound him fast and sought Rory and we carried him down here. He refused to talk despite a beating until I thought of the fire, and now he says that the passage is hidden beyond yon door and that he will show us the way. 'Tis lucky I saw him when I did, for I make no doubt that he was on his way above to murder you both."

A thought struck me, "You say he was bending over the hearth?"

"Aye."

"Where is the knife which you took off him?"

"Why, in the larder," he answered with a note of surprise.

"Get it, Rory—I would see it."

Swiftly he sped above as bidden and coming back handed me the weapon—it was the same strange knife which I had taken from the iron-bound chest in Mactavish's chamber. I looked sharply at the factor, but his face was again blank. Obviously he had been in the chamber, but where could the secret

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passage entrance be? The natural place for it was in the chief's private quarters, but I had sounded every foot of it— Hold! There was the heavy bed—that was it—the entrance was under the bed, which I could not move.

The factor had waited until all was quiet above, then stole up the secret way and probably entered the room while I was on the roof. He had to have been there to get the knife. Yet, he had some more important mission or at least, something which he was more desirous of doing first or he would have waited under the bed and killed us in our sleep.

“Where did you get this?” I asked sternly, holding the knife before his eyes. “Speak!” But he continued to stare at his feet.

“Shall I make him talk?” asked Dougal.

“No matter,” I answered impatiently. “I know where he got it—come show us the passage.”

Dougal yanked him to his feet and he screamed as their blistered soles touched the floor and would have fallen if they had not supported him. But I had no compassion for him now. Tottering across the cellar beside his guard, he indicated a little door. We opened it and beheld a small dungeon beyond. Pointing to a stone in its wall, with a large surface, he told us to push on one side and it turned easily revealing a hole some three feet square. The torch which Rory carried was dying and we returned to

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the cellar, while he went up to secure a lanthorn. When he came back, we retraced our steps and he crawled through the hole dragging the miserable factor after him. Entering in turn we stood in a narrow, low ceiled passage which ran by the opening in two directions. Water trickled down the slimy walls—and the air, in which the lanthorn flickered wanly, was dead.

“Which way is up?” asked Dougal.

The factor pointed to the left in which direction the floor of the passage rose.

“And the other, is that an outlet to the tower?”

“It was,” the man replied, “but it has fallen in and been blocked since long before my time.”

“Go and see, Rory,” said Dougal, keeping a tight grasp upon his prisoner as the light receded from us, though indeed his arms were still bound. A moment later Rory joined us.

“He spoke the truth for once,” he said, “ ’tis indeed blocked with fallen stone and earth.”

Turning to the left, we traversed a steep slope—then we came to steps mounting and turning into the tower. At one point there was a small recess and, peering into it, Dougal said that he could see the glow of the coals on the hearth in the hall. Turning and mounting we came to a blank end where the factor told us to pull an iron ring in a stone overhead. It was pivoted like the one in the

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wall below, and, responding to a strong tug, turned over revealing a hole from which came a faint light.

Crawling through first, I found, as I expected, that we were in Mactavish's room—there was Ranald asprawl, snoring as I had left him. He stirred restlessly as the others entered, but did not awake. Putting on my brogues, which I had left when I crept below, I motioned the others to follow me and descended again into the hall. Dougal blew up the fire and threw on some heather. It blazed up lighting the room and I sat down to ponder, convinced that the fireplace was the point of interest.

Again I questioned the factor sternly, speaking in a low tone so as not to disturb the sleepers. "What were you doing at the fireplace?"

As before he stood silently. "I know that you crept into the secret passage and watched through the peep until all grew quiet. I know that you entered that chamber while the Captain slept, and crept down those stairs after stealing the knife. It was not blood that you were after, as these men thought, because you had had your chance. What you wanted is here, beneath this hearth or in the fireplace. What is it? Speak!"

He stood in silence, rocking back and forth with pain.

"Stick his feet in the fire!" I told Dougal.

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“No! Christ! not that! I cannot stand it more—I will tell you.”

“That’s better. Where is it?”

Speaking slowly as if it was pulled from him with pincers, the factor directed Dougal to reach up in the chimney. There was a ledge there and he would feel a loose slab of stone. Removing this, he would find an iron casket.

Dougal kicked the fire aside and leaned into the chimney, reaching aloft. A shower of soot came down on his face, causing him to cough and spit, but he dropped the slab and again reaching upward, brought down a strongbox.

“Have you the key?”

“Nay, Mactavish has it,” answered the factor.

“Bring it below and something with which to open it.”

Descending again to the cellar, Rory set down the lanthorn and stirred the fire. The factor slumped to the floor with a groan and we three bent over the box as Dougal hammered at the hasp, smashing off the lock. In it were two heavy bags of money, but dropping them, Dougal snatched at something else which glittered in the bottom.

“The Luck of Sannoch!” he cried. “There’s your proof, at last!”

He held towards me an ancient Celtic brooch, of a rare Runic design, made of silver and sur-

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mounted by four cairngorms of purest white. The talisman of our house, said to have been given to one of our chiefs by Bruce at Bannockburn, and worn by the head of the clan ever afterwards—it was worn by my brother, David, that fatal day when he lost his life at the head of Glen Lyon.

I thrust it in the factor's face. "You know of this! Speak!" The factor crouched away from me, his face blue with fear. "Go on! Speak!" He swallowed hard before he whispered,

"I had no part in it—I swear—I had no part in it."

"Aye, but you witnessed it—you were there—you saw it done or he would not have let you into the secret—and you sought to hide the evidence, fearful that we would find it. It is true, is it not?"

"Aye," he whispered. "I saw it done—but I had no part in it, I tell you!"

"Dispatch him," I said, turning towards the stairs.

With a scream, he threw himself, bound as his hands were, grovelling at my feet. "Not that—Christ! Not that!"

As I mounted the stairs, the brooch clutched in my hand, I heard, as in a dream, a stifled cry—then silence from below.

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CHAPTER XVI  
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Kilsyth

FROM the top of the moor where the bitter fight was fought, we stopped and looked back. A pall of smoke arose from the seat of Mactavish's iniquity, and as we watched that symbol of his shattered hopes, there came a dull rumble as of distant thunder, and a great slice of the upper wall broke off. The magazine had exploded and escaping flames shot into the sky. It was done. Sannoch was avenged and peace to our glen assured.

"A fitting ending to the first chapter," observed Ranald. "You have now but to seek the villain and start him on the road to hell."

"I would leave it here. Let the dastard find his own hell on earth—they always do, I ken."

Ranald leaned from his saddle and gripped my arm.

"Would you forget David? Think you that you can lay his ghost until his blood, foully taken, is appeased? What of our Highland tradition and the regard of your clansmen?"

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“I’ve had my fill of blood—my way is not your way, my cousin. I am not a soldier at heart—let the man write his own doom as I am certain he will.”

We rode in silence for a bit.

“You are disappointed with me?” I queried.

“Nay, laddie, ‘tis the truth—your code is not mine. I would have made a soldier of you, patterned on the ideal I set before me at your age, before the ideal was chipped and tarnished. With your patrimony and background, you could have gone far, but you are not cut for it. Yes, methinks it is as well that you are to have me for a neighbour. That Mactavish with all his villainy is a dominant man. He will not quit the table without another cast. Beaten as he has been at his own game, he will stake his all on one last chance with marked cards, and you must meet it, Sannoch, willy-nilly.”

Great was the rejoicing when we returned to the glen, laden with booty and driving the cattle before us. The watchers on the wall anxiously scanning the country for warning of our return, spied us from afar and men and women and children ran out to meet and relieve the warriors of their burdens.

The place was like a madhouse for the next few days, another carousal began to end only when, with soured stomachs, the clansmen picked up their booty and returned to their gutted shielings.

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A strange lethargy seized me. Disconsolately I wandered about the old house, devoid of energy and yet too restless to be still. I wanted nothing so much as peace and quiet, to curl up with an ancient tome of Scottish lays or to take the hound and wander off to lie in the heather above the glen and idly listen to the drone of the bees and the wail of the plover. Yet when I did, I thought again of the bees on the corpses at Auldearn—the cry of the plover became that of the stricken and, sick at heart, I would return to the tower. It was my first chance for peace in a year, and yet I could not win her, woo her as I would.

I tried to console myself with the thought that my position was eminently improved. The glen was in a stronger position than ever before despite our losses. The dreaded Campbell strength was broken and also that of our more immediate enemy. I had unearthed my brother's murderer, and won distinction in the field. More, I had found my own true love, and a staunch friend. But I could not be happy with the evil menace of my enemy still hovering to swoop.

Ranald was impatient to regain the army, but I used the impending death of two of our wounded, whose rites I would be expected to attend, as an excuse to tarry. A week went by in which my godless cousin killed time by fishing the Lyon, and by

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offering consolation to the young and very pretty widow of John Maclean, much to the concern of her neighbours. Scandalized by such goings on with the man barely in his shroud, I remonstrated with him, but he only laughed in my face and went brazenly off to give her one of his Mactavish cups, and to spend the night in her house.

Then in the night came a galloper from the Marquis bidding us make haste to rejoin him, bearing the news of the disastrous defeat of Baillie at Alford, marred by the irreparable loss to our cause of the gallant Lord Gordon. A march into the Lowlands was at last possible, for Montrose had swept all of his opponents from the field. A day was spent in preparation for the coming campaign and to send forth once more for the clansmen who were to accompany us. Meanwhile, we heard in detail of the battle fought again with brilliant strategy. And of how the gallant Gordon died in the moment of victory, shot in the back when he was in the very act of seizing the fleeing Baillie by the belt.

Well we knew what his passing at twenty-eight would mean to his almost equally young commander. The bright and shining light of Scottish valour and nobility, he loved the Marquis with all the adoration of a younger brother—there was no one on his staff save old Lord Airlie who stood so high in his favour. With Gordon gone it was all the

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more imperative for Ranald to return and assume charge of his promised command, so we quit San-noch intending to intercept the army at Dunkeld which we learned it was approaching.

On the way we met the Atholl men coming back in force together with the Clanranalds and Glengarrys and full seven hundred Macleans from Mull under their warrior chieftain Murdock of Lochbuie. There were Lochaber Camerons, Appin Stewarts, Braemar Farquharsons, MacNabs and MacGregors, not to speak of the Ulster contingent, so that with the Horse of Ogilvy and Aboyne, Montrose would have the greatest force ever gathered together under his command, and not an army left to oppose his march into England to relieve King Charles where everything was at sixes and sevens.

The plague had broken out in Edinburgh and the Covenant Government fled, terror stricken, to Stirling. It followed them there and they ran on to Perth where they shut the gates against Montrose and lay behind the walls quaking in their boots while he made a demonstration without, while awaiting the coming of the Highlanders. After scaring the wits out of them, he moved on to Dunkeld, and with the forces joined, had for the first time an army the equal of any in Britain.

But the Covenant was not done. Baillie was given

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a vote of thanks for his defeats and a fresh army was raised, consisting mostly of raw levies from Fife and Angus, it is true, but strengthened by Baillie's cavalry which was still intact and several veteran Lowland regiments. These combined gave him a force of some six thousand men. Meanwhile Lanark had recruited the Hamiltons and was marching from Clydeside to join him; hearing which, the Marquis decided to cut between the twain and prevent a junction. He marched away for Glasgow by the fords of Stirling, through the field of Bannockburn and on the 14th of August, took up position on the Kelvin near the village of Kilsyth.

Baillie was hampered by his precious committee, and lost much valuable time due to the insistence of Argyll, Tullibardine and others that they should stop to burn several Royalist castles on their way. In vain he protested, but they had their own selfish enmities to satisfy. When he arrived at Hollonbush, half a mile from where Montrose awaited him, he would have tarried until Lanark, who was but a few miles away, came up, but his committee, with a valor born of ignorance, insisted upon immediate attack. Had they not six thousand men? And they would not concede that one Highlander was worth two of them.

It was fearfully hot. The sun beat down upon

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the Highland army with unremitting violence and Montrose bade his foot cast their kilts and fight in their saffron shirts which they tied between their legs.

Our force was camped in a hollow surrounded by steep slopes, any one of which we could have occupied. The position seemed untenable even to my unpractised eye.

“In God’s name,” I said to Ranald, “what is the Marquis thinking of to accept such a position?”

“Well, if you ask me, he is afraid that Baillie will refuse to fight unless he has the best position and that will give Lanark a chance to come up and add another fifteen hundred men to his force.”

“But we’re in a box.”

“Aye, but no doubt my lord believes that our Highland wildcats can scramble out of it faster than Baillie’s heavy troops could down us. At any rate, you’ll soon know for there’s their van appearing beyond the crest.”

Baillie approached on a low ridge about which they manœuvred to come onto still higher ground upon our left. The move was suicidal to a large, heavily moving force when opposed by troops which could almost fly. It exposed their long line in flank to a frontal attack. But the committee did not think that the clansmen could charge up the slope and arrive in a condition to fight, nor did

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they dream that they would attempt it. Seeing his opportunity Alasdair launched his valiant Macleans against the slope, followed by the Macdonalds of Clanranald, and they cut through Baillie's centre as a dirk splits a tart. In vain the regiments of Argyll, Cassilis and Glencairn strove to stem the tide, for they were overwhelmed as if by a tidal wave.

Montrose grasped the opportunity and dispatched the Gordon foot to stop Baillie's van, but they found the task too much for them. Aboyne led his horse to their assistance, but he also was surrounded. Then Montrose called upon the grand old warrior of the Highland host, Lord Airlie, to advance his Ogilvys. Blithely as a youngster, the gallant veteran, his white locks gleaming in the sun, galloped forward, screaming his battle cry and for all his sixty years, reached the mêlée with the forefront of his men.

Then, and not till then, did Montrose turn to Ranald, pointing forward—quietly, as if inviting him to canter.

“There, Colonel, is your meat!”

With a clatter, the balance of the cavalry trotted up the long slope, swinging to the right and with heads low, turned in echelon on Baillie's last hope—Balcarres' Horse, which till then had been out of the fight.

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Meanwhile Montrose advanced the main force with a blare of trumpets and pipes and the bone was gnawed clean. The decisive battle of a brilliant campaign had been fought; Scotland had been won; the Border from Berwick to Carlisle was open to an advance into England and the Marquis of Montrose, Lord Lieutenant of Scotland, had at thirty-three established himself as one of the first captains of his age.

I had no personal contact with Kilsyth, being attached to the Marquis' person, but here for the first time, I had the opportunity to observe the master in action. Calm and debonair, his well-knit youthful body sat his horse with the natural ease of the accomplished horseman, from which even his black half armour could not detract. His wide grey eyes took in every contour of the terrain at a glance. He kept his own counsel, asking no questions nor advice. When the time came for action, his orders were terse and to the point; coolly and with precise diction he ordered forth each unit as the time came. He could not have suspected Baillie's intended menace to his left flank until the hot-head, Haldane, gave the show away by attacking Treshnish, yet he immediately slipped the jessies from Gordon and Airlie and followed with the general advance. I had seen him wrest victory from a forlorn hope when outnumbered three to one, by

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frontal attack at Inverlochy, conduct a masterly retreat and turn it to account as at Dundee, and win by superb strategy and perfect handling of his troops at Auldearn. But at Kilsyth, I saw him deliberately give the choice of ground to a stronger opponent, whom he knew would otherwise avoid battle, until further drafts arrived, and then kick him from his path and annihilate him.

Two days later when we reached the gates of Glasgow, a deputation of the burghers met us to make terms for their city. The Marquis reassured them with courtly grace and we entered the capital of the west where we were destined to remain for a time, all too short as it transpired, to suit me. For shortly after we found lodgings, a Highlander came enquiring for me and would give his message to none other.

I questioned the household closely and also young Colin who, since Inverlochy, had always stayed with me, but none knew him, nor could say from whence he came. I went off to see after the care of my men and to attend a council, to find, on my return, that the messenger had come back again, and said that he would wait for me at the Sign of the Bonnie Piper. Suspicious of the hand of Mactavish, I called for Colin to accompany me and, fully armed, repaired to the rendezvous.

The innkeeper indicated with an evil smirk a

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room above, but since the place was full of our own officers, I felt no apprehension and ascended the stairs and knocked upon the door. Almost immediately it flew open and Ellen was in my astonished arms.

“Ellen, sweet,” I cried in amazement, “whatever brings you here?”

“The plague, blessing on it,” she laughed, “’tis an ill wind that blows nobody good. As soon as it was known that the Estates would move to Perth, Ardchatten packed me off here, as he felt that it was too near the zone of war. And now, your blessed Marquis brings you straight to my arms!”

“You know of Kilsyth—I need not ask you that?”

“Aye, Sannoch, and of the bonny fight on the Mactavish braes also. The villain came apacking to my father, with a tale of how with an overpowering force you descended upon his sleeping henchmen and burned them out of their homes. The poor defenceless innocents!”

“Overpowering force!” I railed. “Did he tell you that he sought to invest Sannoch before we returned—and would have done if it had not been for Dougal? Did he tell you of the burned village and the woman and her wee bairns slaughtered before the walls? The dastards outnumbered the Sannoch men two to one.”

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I told her the whole story from the beginning, how Dougal and Rory had forced the secret of David's murder from the lips of the factor and of the recovery of the talisman which I wore.

"The beast is worse than I dreamed!" she cried, cheeks aflame and eyes flashing. "He came to my father pressing his suit for my hand. But don't fear," she added scornfully, "Ardchatten sent him packing with the comment that a man who could not hold his own was no fit husband for his daughter. That did not suffice him—the beast followed me here and for all I know is still in the town, lurking in wait for you. 'Tis why I dared not bid you come to my lodging, but bade you meet me secretly here."

"Do you know, sweet, where he lodges?"

"Nay, nor did I know. He has not been seen since word reached the city of Montrose's coming. But to tell you the truth, I have stayed indoors—for I truly fear the brute. He will stoop to anything for his wicked vengeance. How he found me I do not know—but he came, nevertheless, with his vile proposal. I lost my head when he laid his hands upon me and threw your name in his face, vowing I would have you kill him. He laughed evilly, saying that it was the only clue he needed—that he knew that I had assisted your escape from Edinburgh—though I think he only suspected it till

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then. And when he had you in his power, he said he would come back and bargain to better advantage."

"Curse him!" I raved, "Ranald is right as always. I must finish with Mactavish. I was forgetful of David—I had to force myself to carry on the raid, until I stood in my smouldering village. And when it was over, I had no ambition to pursue him further. I thought I had had enough of killing, but with this fresh affront, it cannot be till the adder is crushed.

"You are safe while we are here, but once we leave Glasgow he may well get you into his power. For even Ardchatten's daughter would not be saved from gaol if he told some of your uncompromising ministers of his suspicions."

"I fear not that!" she declared bravely. "Ardchatten will not see his daughter in the Tolbooth. It is, rather, that in his wicked hatred of you, he is quite capable of trying to get you into his power through me. So when you leave Glasgow I shall go straight home to Argyll, to the house where you first met me."

Eventually, thinking of poor Colin standing below, I opened the casement and bade him seek out Ranald and bring him to us for supper and meanwhile to send aloft the innkeeper that we might order a suitable repast. Time flew on, but we

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recked not of that. Meanwhile I sat beside my Ellen until I heard Ranald's tread without and in response to a lusty knock opened the door. One glance was sufficient to show that he was dressed for an occasion. His crisp brown hair was carefully done and his best Flemish lace hung over his knuckles as with his plumed French hat he swept the floor. Sword cocked and feet pointed, as if at the court of France, he bowed to Ellen before crossing the room to raise her hand to his lips.

"Lord, cousin, why all this finery? 'Tis but a simple supper!"

"Simple, sir," he mocked. "Call your reunion with the loveliest maid of Argyllshire—and our saviour to boot—simple? Alas, Mistress Ellen, for the rude manners of my all too simple Highland cousin. But his heart is good. You are glad to see him, I trust," and added, *sotto voce*, "you know that the booby was afraid after our last abrupt parting that you would blame him because I bearded your father."

Carried away with the deviltry in his eye and his show of concern for our hasty departure from Crief, she tossed back her head and laughed.

"Indeed, Captain," she said, taking his hand in hers, "I find I have much to thank you for. Sannoch tells me of your support on the braes of Mactavish. I fear he might not have come back to me but for your timely aid."

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“Tush, 'twas but a little brawl! And, by the way, I will have you know that I am a colonel—not that it makes any great difference,” he added hastily, noting her embarrassment, “but you see, if I am a Colonel of the Royal Horse, I should be able to handle the situation with a few Highland kernes —now shouldn’t I?”

“As for that,” she cried, “Highland kernes have routed fine cavalry before and lived to sing of it, my Colonel!”

“Ah, yes,” he parried quickly, “but not my cavalry, for you see I am a Highland cavalryman, strange as it may seem.”

“There is no arguing with him,” I interrupted. “Do, Ellen, let him be—I am sorry that I asked him here whatever. He dresses himself like a field marshal to make me feel the meaner, usurps the conversation and the attention of my lady—”

“But you will be glad that you asked me,” replied Ranald, “for I have a rare surprise for you and methinks it comes now,” he added and, stepping from the casement where he had secured a view of the street, he strode across to the door.

“What is it?” we both asked.

He signalled to us to be silent, and stood listening to a step mounting the stairs. Thinking that it was some mummery of his or a present coming for Ellen, knowing Ranald had a knack for thinking of those little things which endeared him to a

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woman, I kept my seat beside her. As the door opened, I beheld a heavily cloaked figure in the corridor, and dim as the light was, instantly recognized the newcomer as he dropped the cloak from his face. I sprang to my feet.

“My Lord Marquis!!”

That was the reason for Ranald’s finery. Ellen had risen panic-stricken to her feet at my exclamation of surprise, and stood with her hand to her throat, as I stepped forward to relieve the Marquis of his cloak and hat.

“You know me?” he said, striding over to Ellen and raising her trembling hand to his lips. “I hope that you and Sannoch will pardon this intrusion. I merely wished, Mistress, to pay my respects to the brave daughter of a brave Scot. I wish also to thank you for the succour of these gentlemen of mine when their fate was in your pretty hands.”

Ellen curtsied to the floor, her fright dispersed in one flash by his charming personality. “My lord,” she said, “I owed these gentlemen overmuch. I would do as much for the King’s Lieutenant, if possible without injury to my father’s cause.”

“Very prettily said,” he laughed. “Exactly what I would have expected of Ardchatten’s daughter, or I’d not be here. The truth is that I had three strings to my bow in coming. First, to see for my-

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self the lovely Ellen—I have the welfare of my men at heart—and you have my blessing for what it is worth. Secondly, I have a confidential message for your father. Thirdly, I am famished, tired, and in need of relaxation, where my accursed aides cannot find me. Colonel Mackenzie tells me this may be a betrothal feast, and if not let us make it so.”

“My lord,” I stammered, “this honor—”

“Tush, for your honour, Sannoch. You’re probably like the rest—honoured today and offended tomorrow. You see,” he added aside to Ellen, “I know the breed, do I not? Rather than honours, let us have a moment’s peace together, relaxation and forgetfulness—and food, man, food!!”

Ranald had already sent for the landlord and when two servingmen appeared with him bearing sundry viands which I had neither the thought nor the gift to order, I saw Ranald’s hand in it again. He had prepared early for his surprise.

We sat long before the board, sipping our wine and talking of lighter things, Montrose so skilfully controlling the conversation that it never touched a topic which would have been embarrassing to Ellen’s political affiliations. He talked of his days as a student in Glasgow, and of his beloved children, one of whom was dead in the Highlands, another a prisoner in the castle at Edinburgh. He talked of

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the courts of Europe which he had visited and drew Ranald into a discussion of his Continental campaigns. Finally; as it grew late, he sang a song of his own composition to Ellen in a fine Highland voice and rising to go, held her hand in his.

"Mistress Ellen," he said, "I thank you for this evening. I have had little time of late for such. Will you take a message to your father for me?"

"My lord, I will carry it to the end of Scotland, if need be."

"Nay, 'tis not as important as that. Just convey my thanks to him for his consideration of my poor Royalists who have fallen into the hands of his party and his unflinching courage in defending them from charges of treason. Tell him that he can always depend upon my doing as much for him. Tell him that I hope for the day when we can clasp hands as I do now with his daughter and tell him that I know no better way to make that possible and poor Scotland happier than by joining your hand with Sannoch's."

He kissed her fingers, slapped me on the back, and refusing Ranald's offer to see him to his quarters, with the remark that we were none too many to see such a jewel as Ellen Campbell home, he drew his cape closely about him and we heard his feet as he ran down the stairs and out whistling into the street.

CHAPTER XVII

Philiphaugh

NEVER had Montrose's prospects seemed so bright. He had swept every opponent from his paths and the way lay open to lead his army across the Border to the assistance of sorely pressed King Charles. No sooner had the news of Kilsyth spread than the Lowland nobles came flocking in to Glasgow to pay homage to the King's Lieutenant, with promises of money and men galore.

Linlithgow, Carnegie, Erskine, and Seton, even Drummond who fought against us at Tippermuir, and such great Border lairds as Roxburgh, Dalziel, Hume, and the Marquis of Douglas declared themselves with avowals of support.

The promises of Digby's fifteen hundred foot and the five hundred horse of Musgrave from over the Border, which never came, were forgotten. Montrose had no need of them now and fondly expected to lead full twenty thousand men into England when he had set the government of Scotland in order.

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His first act was to dispatch the Master of Napier to Edinburgh to deliver the Royalist prisoners who lay rotting in the pestilential Tolbooth, and to exact a fine with the city's submission.

At the same time it was found necessary to evacuate Glasgow. That fair, fat city was too tempting to some of our wild Highland kernes, who though its rich booties in the Saltmarket and other prosperous portions of the town were justly theirs to pillage, and despite Montrose's assurance that the city would not be violated, there was some looting until he caught the ringleaders and promptly hanged a half dozen of them. This led to much discontent and grumbling and to avoid recurrences of the trouble, the army was moved to Bothwell.

On the very day that Napier returned with the released prisoners, the King's Secretary of Scotland arrived bearing a patent for Montrose, proclaiming him Lieutenant-Governor and Captain-General of all Scotland. On the third of September, a great review was held of all his troops, in celebration of his promotion, after which Sir Archibald Primrose presented the Viceroy with his Royal commission midst the tumultuous cheers of the army.

Montrose's first act under his Viceroyship was to confer the order of knighthood upon the brave Alasdair, who had so justly earned it. He then issued proclamations to the principal towns sum-

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moning a Parliament to be held in Glasgow on the twentieth of October, for settling religious differences and bringing peace to the land.

Returning to our quarters burning with enthusiasm, I found Ranald there before me removing some of his finery.

"Well," he railed, "you seem elated. Had you a letter from your Mistress Ellen?"

"Is it not glorious!" I answered, paying no heed to his quip. "Scotland is in the hollow of Montrose's hand. Soon we will be over the Border and bring this bloody struggle to a close."

"Softly, cousin!" he replied. "It's not all so easy as that. Scotland does, for the moment, lie, as you say, in the hollow of his hand, but how long will it? And how much of it is he strong enough to hold, when it begins to squirm? We are not through with the Covenant yet."

"You have read his manifesto?" I asked in wonderment. "Think you not that will cement the feeling of the people? Surely they have had enough of war and the King long since bowed to the Kirk."

"Aye," he replied, as released from his back and breast plate he flexed his muscles and took a turn about the room. "I know all that, but mind you this: we are a long way from England yet. There is much grumbling and complaint among the wild western men that they were not given Glasgow as

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they expected. It was the lure of the rich cities—Edinburgh and Glasgow with, possibly, Carlisle and the Border towns, which enticed them out of their misty hills. 'Tis their creed that the spoils should follow the victory and though they have now more than they could stagger back to their crofts under the weight of, they feel—and justly—that this fattest of all the Lowland cities was held like a plum before their mouths only to be snatched away.

"The Marquis was between the devil and the deep blue sea. Sack Glasgow and all hope of support from the still suspicious Lowland lairds was gone forever, but to refuse it was to affront the backbone of his army. Do not forget, cousin, that Scotland is still two countries. The Lowlands look with fear and suspicion at any Highland offer of support. They cannot forget that they, one and all, have lost relatives in the Highland wars. The fact that they fought side by side at Falkirk, Flodden, and Bannockburn does not alter the fact that we talk a different language, practise the old religion, that our people are half-wild barbarians. It will take more than a proclamation to change that. Who, but a few like ourselves, are capable of understanding it? Among the clans they can read naught but Gaelic and little enough of that. And think you that the poor Lowlander in town or country will

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ever get a true version of it? Their voice and ears is their ministry—they will only hear that about the proclamation which their clergy intend to have them hear. Cannot you imagine how fairly those worthies will deal with their arch-enemy, Montrose?"

"One thing will appeal to all alike—his promise to reduce taxation; but think you they will have much faith in that when they see him increasing his army, knowing it must be clothed and fed at their expense?"

I shook my head dolefully, my erstwhile enthusiasm entirely quelled. "Alas, then, what profit all these victories? Are they to get us nowhere? Why carry on with it, if all you say is true?"

"I am a soldier, not a politician, Sannoch. 'Tis not a soldier's business to worry over the political consequence of what he accomplishes with his sword. I am given a cavalry command and I will fight it to the best of my ability here or in England. But I honestly do not expect Montrose to succour Charles; if he and his cavaliers cannot extricate themselves they are doomed. We have helped him much by detaining some of the finest British regiments in the north and then annihilating them. But our burden is a big one, we cannot carry theirs also. All I hoped for Montrose to accomplish he has done.

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“The Highlands have never dominated the Lowlands for long. Once we lose the upper hand, the whole task is to be done over again. Cross the Border with the Highland force and the Covenant will break out at our backs. But I don’t think we will get our kerns into England. Already they are impatient to be home with their pelf!”

Alas! Ranald’s prophecy was all too true. The army which had fought so gallantly under the Marquis on many fields began to trickle slowly away, as the snow melts under a spring sun. They wanted to go back to their homes, their whole system of living demanded it. They did not understand organized war such as Montrose wished to pursue. Their women and children would soon starve if they did not return to replenish the larders. War was their most important business, but they were so miserably poor they had to dispose of their spoils. Then also, there were other fish to fry. The Macleans had to look to the protection of Mull or the Campbells would descend upon it to avenge Kilsyth. Clan Donald had still its ancient grudges which even Inverlochy had not entirely paid.

The first to desert was Alasdair, taking with him most of his Irish on an expedition of his own, to further chastise the Campbells. It was the last we ever saw of that mighty warrior. He went

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away into the mist, to fight his private battles as the Highlander has so many times before. It was the last the world was to hear of him until he was ignominiously slain in a drunken Irish brawl, some four years later—the paladin who had shed lustre on the scrolls of the Fianna went down with the dirk of a filthy kerne in his back.

It was a bitter blow to Montrose, for not only was the loss of his Irish and practically all of the men of the Isles a serious one, but Alasdair, though a poor general on his own, was as the Marquis' right hand, worth a regiment himself. Misfortunes come not singly and more were to follow; we broke camp at Bothwell, and started an advance on Tweed, intending to go by way of the Lammermoors to recruit the country of Roxburgh and Hume. Aboyne was insulted because Ranald had been given command of the Cavalry, and fomented by his father, Huntly. The restoration of Lord Ogilvy to his command upon his release from prison appeared as a further slight to the irascible Gordons and in spite of all appeals, he marched off for home with all his men. Of the family, Nathaniel Gordon remained ever faithful to his General and his King.

Fearing the plague, we avoided Edinburgh, traversing the Lothians by way of Cranstown to Dalkeith. It was there that appalling news came of David Leslie. Pursuing the King in England, on

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hearing of Kilsyth, he turned hurriedly north with four thousand picked troops and having collected further reinforcement from the garrisons at Newcastle and Berwick, had passed unchallenged across the Tweed on the sixth of September. He was hurrying on with all possible haste to engage the Marquis before he could reach Roxburgh, Hume and the vast lands of the Douglas' and thus augment his force.

Ranald sought me out in the streets of Dalkeith with a grim expression upon his countenance. "Come," he said, "they have just called a staff council, and I would have you there. The time has come to talk and I, for one, do not intend to mince my words with the Marquis. We must get out of this damned Lowland country before it is too late."

It was raining heavily as we stumbled up the dark street to headquarters in an ominous silence. The guard stepped aside to give us entrance and we found ourselves in the small parlour of the town's only inn. Montrose sat at the centre of the table, with Ogilvy and Erskine on either side of him. The rest of his staff were standing about the four walls of the room, the water trickling from their kilts and corselets. I looked at the Marquis. His face was pinched and drawn. The effects of the long campaign and the constant difficulties of his

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position were beginning to tell on him. He had the look of one who had been trained too fine. Another one or two belatedly followed us in, and the Marquis proceeded to address us.

“My lords and gentlemen: Doubtless you have all heard the news which Lord Erskine brings us from the south. David Leslie, hearing of Kilsyth, was forced by his men to turn north. They refused to continue their pursuit of His Majesty while Scotland remained defenseless in our hands. He has with him no less than six thousand men, including the regiments of Dalhousie, Eglinton, Middleton, and Leven and the Dragoons of Fraser, Kirkcudbright and Barclay, to say nothing of the recruits of Clydesdale and Tweeddale which he picked up upon his way.”

A murmur of amazed alarm swept through the room and Lord Erskine openly advised an immediate retreat towards the Highland line.

To this the Marquis courteously shook his head. His view was that needing men with which to oppose Leslie, he could gain them quicker in the Lowland counties. Particularly as Aboyne’s quitting had left him with less than a hundred Horse, and horses which were more plentiful in the Lowlands were what he had most pressing need for. He glanced at Ranald for support.

Ranald stepped forth into the centre of the room

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facing the Viceroy, and when he spoke, uncompromising determination was in his face and voice.

"My lord Marquis, my lords and gentlemen, our commander has every right to expect my fullest support in anything which he may decide to do. If he tells me to lead my little squadron to London straight, I'll do my best to cut my way through, but I would be of little use to him if I could not as boldly tell him if I found his strategy unsound.

" 'Tis true we need horses, but mounting a man does not make him a trooper and Leslie's dragoons are seasoned veterans of Cromwell's brand. I will need time to make cavalry of the raw recruits capable of withstanding them. Without strong cavalry support in this open country, our infantry is doomed. No infantry in the world can withstand a cavalry charge unaided except O'Cahan's Irish, of which he has less than five hundred left and our Highlanders, of which Alasdair, in his selfishness, took off the best. We must return to the Highland line."

Montrose flushed with impatience as a murmur of acquiescence went about the room, intermingled with the opposition of the Lowland gentry.

"Colonel Mackenzie's reasoning is sound, but to follow it is to give up virtually all we have fought for—all we have gained. Valuable time will be lost recruiting in the north and we are not

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certain that we could induce the Highlands to descend again to the Border, much less cross it; and that, as you know, is my intent—to offer His Majesty this tangible service."

"Aye, my lord, well we know that," continued Ranald, "'tis your abiding passion to fight your way to his side, but commendable as it may seem, it is the one weak link in your strategy—of which too little has been said in these councils. 'Tis hopeless; never has a Scottish army carried war successfully into England. 'Tis too far from our hills for the Highlander who has always been the backbone of our offensive—say what these Border gentlemen will. We do not fight with confidence in the Lowland levies and the Lowlanders are equally suspicious of us—with some justice. Just as soon as our Highlanders fill their sporrans they're off to the hills. An army of such men cannot invade a foreign country no matter how well they fight in defence of their own bailiwicks!"

"The most you can do is hold what you have won. You have defeated six armies and destroyed them, and for a time, you can continue to do so, but come what will and strive as you may, you will never be permanently successful beyond the Highland line.

"You cannot suffer a defeat such as you have imposed upon your opponents. There is no hope for you, my lord, of freeing His Majesty of the

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Covenant yoke. If you are undefeated you can make it easier for him by keeping valuable troops in Scotland to oppose you. But once defeated, you are through—you can never survive it—the jackals will pull you down.

“If His Majesty and his cavaliers look to us for succour—they look in vain. If they are to win, they must do so by dint of their own right arms—it is no more than we are doing here—and something less, I ken, for we drew some of their best against us. Aye, and beat them when outnumbered three to one. And I would add, my lords and gentlemen, if they are worth saving they can do as much for themselves as we poor Scots can do to help them!”

Montrose came to his feet, his eyes flashing.

“Colonel Mackenzie, I’ll not suffer such comment of His Majesty from one of my command.”

But Ranald gave him look for look.

“My lord, I think you will have to. I lent His Majesty my sword. I’ll fight for him to the end, as well you know—I’ll give my life for him, if necessary. But I will not forget that I am a Mackenzie and as such I have the right to my opinion of any man. As long as I stake my all in his cause, win or lose, good or bad, I’ll criticise any one save God!”

“You will not do so here!”

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"*I am* doing so! If you go not behind the Highland line you will lose, my lord, barring a miraculous streak of luck, and you have had over much of that. And if Charles Stuart and his cause is worth while then with the nobility of England behind him he should be able to hold his own over the Border—if he cannot do that, while we hold the north for him, his cause is not healthy enough to be worth the sacrifice of the noble blood of Scotland which is represented in this room."

A murmur of approval filled the chamber to be silenced by a sweeping glance from Montrose. He stood with his hand clinched upon the table, until the knuckles showed white under his windburned skin. Complete silence reigned as, nothing daunted, Ranald stood his ground. I could not but warm to his uncompromising honesty and I felt that every Highlander present knew that he was right. Greater effort could not be expected of us with the force at our command or if strengthened only by the raw and unreliable levies of the Lowlands.

Finally our leader spoke, and in doing so showed the great man he was. "Colonel Mackenzie, there is only one reason why I do not ask you for your sword—the King needs it. It is therefore more useful to me in your hand than it would be in my possession. We will continue our march to Roxburgh at dawn."

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Ranald bowed and stalked from the room.

On the morrow we turned right and proceeded down the Gala Water towards Tweedside and two days later at Torwoodle we were greatly heartened by the arrival of Douglas with a thousand horse from Nithsdale and Clydesdale, consisting of the local gentry and their retainers. Ranald, to whom I spoke of this encouragement, shook his head. He had the eye for appraising soldiers and he saw in them an unstable rabble with none of the old Borderer's tenacity of purpose. Then came Linton with his Peebleshire troops and marching slowly on down the Tweed, we approached Kelso, where we were to meet Roxburgh and Hume.

We waited their coming for a day and then received the disheartening news that the precious pair were the prisoners of Leslie, or so the story ran, captured by Middleton's Horse, and the tale smelt evilly of stale fish. It seemed unlikely that two such powerful nobles would have been caught napping in the heart of their own country, some twenty miles from the line of Leslie's advance, unless they did so deliberately, feeling that they would be safer in his hands than they would opposed to him.

Montrose turned warily up the Tweed, it being unwise to tarry at Kelso since the hope of the Border was fruitless. Douglas had overestimated

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his influence in a land where the Kirk was all-powerful and recruits few and far between. Montrose was forced to turn his eyes back to the hills as Ranald had urged him to do. We went to Jedburgh, but there was no encouragement from the Covenanting Kerrs. Then on to the land of Buccleuch, where our Irish were looked upon askance and no one would come to join us, and we eventually arrived at Selkirk outside of which the army camped on the flats of Philiphaugh, beside the Ettrick waters. Our position was but loosely held, as the enemy was believed to be far away on the Forth where Montrose intended to pursue them. Our guns were placed and a shallow trench dug in front of them, the camp protected on the south and east by the Ettrick, on the west by the Yarrow and to the north by a line of hills.

A staff council was held that night at Montrose's lodging in the West Port of Selkirk. Sir John Spottswode was bidden to write again to Digby and press him for his oft-promised cavalry. Many things were taken up but little was accomplished. The Marquis was in low spirits, engendered by fatigue, and his depression was reflected in his staff. The council dawdled to a close, and long after they had left he sat over his correspondence and maps. I was on duty that night and a few

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hours before dawn I remonstrated with him for not getting some rest. He stretched his arms and, pushing back his chair, stood up and walked to the fire.

"There is no rest for me, Sannoch, for there is no end. As soon as we crush an enemy another springs up in his place. 'Tis like a nightmare. A month ago I held Scotland in the hollow of my hand—and where is it now? Colonel Mackenzie is right so far as he can see. Our strength is in the Highlands, but the reason for it is obscure. The Covenant still holds the money bags; they can pay their troops and I cannot. I must wave the spoils of conquest in front of the Highlanders, thereby alienating the Lowlands. I know that I cannot hold Scotland unless I conquer the Lowlands or win them to my side, and in no other way can I bring lasting benefit to His Majesty.

"Yet to return to the hills, and degenerate to the level of a raiding Highland chief, is to admit defeat and but to postpone the inevitable. It is here that the decision must be won. My hope is that we can delay the battle until we whip these Lowland levies into shape. God knows they fought well enough in the Border Wars, they should do so again."

He rested his brow on the mantel shelf and mur-

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mured moodily to himself, apparently forgetting my presence for the moment.

"If only I had Alasdair's Ulstermen and the clans to brace them I would have little to fear. We could tear Leslie to pieces and be over the Border in a week. If only they had stood by me for but a little while. If only Seaforth could think a little of his King and less of himself. His Mackenzies muster more claymores than I have ever commanded. Can you not think what I could accomplish with them—and your hot-headed cousin to lead them? If Huntly could only bury his insane jealousy and let his Gordons fight."

He raised his head and pounded his fist upon the shelf in impotent rage.

"If, if, if! it's always that, but the trouble is deeper. It is my lack of money—money that begins to rule the world, and the greed of my supporters. Even Alasdair's barony was too much for him and he marches off to settle his own accounts instead of waiting until His Majesty's work is done."

"My lord," I remonstrated, "'tis the history of Scotland repeating itself, yet in the end other leaders have won even as you will."

"I wonder? Kilsyth should have been my Bannockburn. Scotland was more united then than now, and money did not rule. In civil war it is

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the paid armies that will win. But get you to bed, Sannoch, and seek your rest."

It was a dismal morning, everything was enveloped in a thick mantle of impenetrable fog. It seeped into the house and everything was damp and sticky. Young Ogilvy of Powrie, in from a fruitless patrol, had just awakened me, remarking that it was a miserable day to march when there was a clatter of hoofs in the courtyard and Captain Blackadder flung himself into the house wild-eyed and crying for the Marquis.

The thunderbolt had struck. Our troops had but finished their breakfast and were assembling for parade when through the fog came the pounding of Leslie's Horse. Before Blackadder had finished with his devastating news, Montrose was in the saddle and galloping to the scene followed by Crawford, old Airlie, Napier and others of us who were with him in Selkirk.

The scene which met our eyes was one of frightful confusion. O'Cahan's superb Irish stood like a rock in their shallow trench against which waves of Leslie's cavalry broke in vain. The single squadron of cavalry under Ranald had charged Kirkcudbright's Dragoons driving them back in confusion and were reforming to charge again when Montrose put himself at their head. But the cravenly levies of Douglas fled at the first alarm.

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Montrose led the second charge of the reformed Horse increased by his staff and gentlemen, fighting so furiously that for a time the entire Covenant cavalry was driven back, giving the Irish a chance to reform. Then if we still had with us the men of the Western Isles and the mighty Alasdair, the day might still have been saved, but alas, the gallant Marquis' bright star had set. It was doomed to glimmer on the horizon of the Highlands for a few short months, until obscured by the mists of self-interest and petty politics. It was to rise and flash again five years hence, but for a while and then be laid to rest forever in the hearts of his countrymen.

There was no Alasdair to lead his berserks into the face of death and drive it cringing before his valour. The Highland host had dwindled to a few of the faithful who would have followed him to hell.

Doggedly, foot by foot, O'Cahan's infantry gave their ground, again and again they drove Leslie back, but each time at fearful cost, which left their ranks thinner. The cavalry charged and reformed and charged again, sword arms weary and horses ready to drop, and held up the enemy, saving the very cravens who had deserted them at the first alarm.

But six hundred cannot fight an army forever.

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Realising that the rest would be butchery, I detached myself from the cavalry which Ranald sought to reform for one more onslaught and rode off to find my Sannoch men and die with them.

True to their post, I found them on the right of the line with the remains of the Highland contingent. They and the Ulstermen, now numbering less than three hundred, had been driven into their last position midst the sheepfolds and byres of Philiphaugh Farm. It was the towering presence of old Dougal which guided me to them. The valiant little band stood at bay in the angle of a stone wall before which lay a heap of Covenant dead. Rory Oig, his face scarlet from a clip on the pate, which in no way dampened his ardour for battle, stood screaming Gaelic curses and brandishing his claymore at Dalhousie's Regiment which could be dimly seen through the fog, reforming in front. Colin was hastily reloading his musketoon, his sword stuck readily in the ground beside him.

Of the score who had followed me from Sannoch, but a handful now remained. Kilsyth had taken two, others had been dispatched to the hills with booty, and here in the shambles before me lay a bitter toll. Six men, who held allegiance to Sannoch, were on their feet—well, no matter, we had made our bed of thorns and would lie in it together. This was the end to all our dreams—to

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be hacked down in the dung heaps of the old farm.

But Dougal thought otherwise; his indomitable spirit knew no defeat which could not be remedied. Reading my thoughts aright, as I was about to dismount and join them, he grasped my bridle.

“No,” he shouted, “catch us up some of those riderless horses, and we’ll awa’ when the fog lets doon agen. You owe it to the Glen, Sannoch. Would you leave it to Mactavish’s mercy?”

The name of my enemy heartened me like old wine. Dougal was right: we had given all that counted for the cause. I was a poor laird indeed if I thought not of the loved ones of those who had died for me. There were many riderless horses, whose saddles had been emptied by Highland musketoon and pike, trotting about and adding to the confusion. And the poor frightened things were easily caught and handled—they seemed to look to man, who got them into trouble, to get them out again.

Riding back with one, as Wallace brought in another, Dougal signified that the time had come, for the heavy enveloping fog had let down again. Bidding two of the men to catch hold of my stirrup leathers, I trotted off at a lively pace, the others following.

We splashed through the Yarrow and made in a westerly direction whilst the din and firing in

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the distance dribbled off into a desultory sputtering, deadened by the fog and the widening gap between us. Soon we were in a wild moorland country following the lead of two Selkirk men who had come away with us. Some ten miles from the battlefield they led us across the headwaters of the Tweed and we stopped on the far bank to rest. It was now about noon and the exhausted men dropped on their faces in the heather, whilst we loosed the girths on our weary horses and tethered them to feed on the grass which fought for a living about the wettish places.

There were many wounds and abrasions to be attended to after which we collected all the food there was amongst us and apportioned to each his share. It was not much, but a couple of lengths of sausage and a bannock or two washed down with cool burn water will go a long way towards reviving famished men.

I offered to administer to Rory's pate, but he only laughed and soused it in a nearby pool, adding that it was no time to dally on the brae like a silly lot of sheep when we could expect Leslie's Horse to be scouring the country before long. Realizing the truth of this, we again started on our way, heading in a northwesterly direction, the sooner to reach the blessed hills from which I, for one, hoped that I should never wander again. Our pace was

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slow for as the sun burned off the mist, the increased heat sapped our fast dying energies and we floundered on through the thick heather avoiding the boggy places as best we could.

The lonely moorland stretched away from us in every direction as far as the eye could reach. Wearily dragging ourselves up a long exhausting slope we would behold another great flat expanse before us and struggle on until suddenly we came to a brink where the water flowed far below. It was while we were on one of these broad plateaus that, looking fearfully to the rear, I saw a large body of horsemen. At my exclamation of warning Dougal acted instantly. Bidding me dismount, he and Rory quickly threw the horses and we all lay flat in the heather, praying that we had not been seen.

Undoubtedly it was a Covenant troop seeking refugees from the battle, and woe betide our little band if they had spied us. They were a couple of miles away when first we perceived them and with a line of low lying hills at our backs, it was possible that we had not caught their eye. As we watched, a muttered warning from Colin drew our fearful attention to another group of horsemen riding in such a direction that it would take them diagonally to our rear. We all took heart when both groups trotted out of sight over the sky-

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line, but we still lay like a covey of frightened partridge, afraid to move.

Said Dougal, "Let one warning be enough. Our only chance is to get rid of these horses and lie close till dark. The laird will have to walk with the rest of us."

I was glad to do so, for nothing would have led me to ride off and leave them. And I was unhurt while some of the men, though not seriously wounded, were beginning to show the strain of our journey.

As soon as it seemed safe they removed the saddlery from the horses and turned them loose. As they wandered off, for all the world like two moor ponies, we again lay down in the heather to await the friendly shield of darkness.

When the soft folds of evening mellowed the light, Dougal took a careful spy and bid us start, for he was anxious to reach some point of vantage for a last look about before it was too dark.

Climbing to the top of a knobie, we beheld the horsemen still combing the heather on another moor beyond a deep glen from us. I can see Rory now leaning on his claymore with the blood red sun gleaming upon his ruddy face, while he balefully watched the grim searchers, his heart bitter with the gall of hatred and impotency.

That night we were well into the Pentland Hills

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where we dropped supperless in the heather to sleep like dead men. There was no thought of placing a watch, and indeed not one of us was capable of keeping it. In the morning we were desperate for food. Come what might we had to chance it, for without nourishment it was impossible to go on another day. Sighting a croft, we split up so as to approach it from all sides and prevent anyone from running off to give warning of our presence and stalked silently upon the buildings. The crofter's family were eating their morning porrich as we appeared at the door and all sprang up in alarm. As indeed they had cause to do for we must have presented a wild and forbidding appearance. I told them that we meant no harm and that I would pay well for all they gave us, warning them with dire threats of vengeance if they betrayed us to the Covenanters.

The crofter assured us that they were friendly to our cause and gave us their porrich, bidding the good wife make more and provided us with a couple of cold bannocks and what was more welcome, a black bottle of spirits, for which I gave him two gold coins to help seal his mouth. I had little fear that the simple fellow would betray us for he no doubt had never seen so much wealth before, but we could not take chances. So after putting an hour between us, we turned sharp west and went

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on for a few miles more when, the morning being well advanced, we hid away in the bracken and awaited the coming of another night.

The Forth was a barrier which we knew too well would be vigilantly guarded, and bearing to the west, we passed through Linlithgow in the night keeping to bypaths and lonely roads in the general direction of Kilsyth, from where on we knew the country well. The next day we were in the Campsie Fells well west of Stirling and comparatively safe for the moment as many of the people were friendly to us and we had little difficulty in getting food. Four days later, weary unto death we staggered into Sannoch where, until the bloodhounds of the Covenant were turned loose to hunt us down, we could rest.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Reckoning

AGAIN I sat before the fire in the ancient hall of my ancestors, the scene of Sannoch's greatness and its fall, idly stroking the staghound's head and bitterly considering all that had happened to me and my people in one short year and but a little more. A year of ceaseless strife and bloodshed—a year of high ambition and utter despair—a year of ecstasy and misery and degradation—to end mayhap upon the gallows.

A fantastic panorama of jumbled events flitted about in the flames of the birch logs—Ranald in his great blue cloak, stamping the snow from his jack boots. Where was he now with his high hopes, proud as Lucifer, implacable and cold as steel, yet true as steel, too? Probably food for the corbies on that awful field at Philiphaugh. Well, no matter, it was a fitting end—would that mine could be as gallant.

Montrose,—the glittering feast to Alasdair at Blair Atholl, where he flung the Campbells into

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the jaws of his dogs of war—the terrible march on Inverlochy—the stricken field of Auldearn—God! it still made me retch. Montrose sitting his horse at Kilsyth with Scotland, the Scotland he hoped for, in his grasp,—Montrose as he sought to justify himself before Philiphaugh because his honesty to his followers and his love for his King made him do so.

And Ellen—I seemed to see her bronze tresses in the ruddy glow, as with her arms outstretched to me, she pled with me to come to her. That I could never do now, pride forbade that I should seek her when beaten to my knees, with a rope ready for my neck. Ellen with her soft mouth pressed to mine, in the inn at Crief—Ellen tickling me to wakefulness in the haymow. Ellen fleeing like a fawn with us through the alleys of Edinburgh—That was over, too.

And Mactavish, curse him, the seat of all my woes—leering at me in Blair, taunting me in public and seeking my life in the dark—who murdered my brother and harried my glen. What good now our retaliation? Where in the name of God was the justice in it all?

Dougal came in with a bottle and cups, to sit down heavily across the table. I had been drinking much since my return, to silence the qualms and utter despair and drive the stench of stale blood

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from my nostrils. It was not for myself that I despaired, but my poor clansmen, whom I could do nothing to relieve. Were I like Ranald I had simply to shake the dust of Scotland from my feet, take ship to the Low-countries, and sell my sword to the highest bidder. But I could not do that; I was the laird, I had to stand by the Glen, probably to be chevied about until caught and dragged to the Tolbooth.

I poured hot water from the kettle into my whisky and took a sip, and then— Ben raised his head with ears acock and with a roar dashed to the door as the pounding of hoofs drummed over the turf.

“Hello, within!”

No need to ask, there was but one such voice!

“Sweet Christ be thanked!” cried Dougal overturning the settle in his haste to get to the door, where, in his excitement, he could hardly let down the bars. Then out we dashed to knock Ranald clear off his feet and catch him to us ere he fell. Shouting questions, cursing, and giving thanks all in one we dragged him in whilst the hound clawed the cloak from off his back.

“For Holy Mary, give me a drink before you kill me!” he cried with a laugh, on seeing the bottle, and thrusting us from him, seized it, turning a good part of its contents down his throat.

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“Now! I see you made it! Thank God for that, laddie. I broke away as soon as I could, knowing you would make here if you were alive. Did any of the rest of yours get clear?”

I indicated Dougal, and added that Red Wallace, Rory, young Colin and two of the Macleans had come home with me.

“Might have known it,” he said with satisfaction. “Peace-loving folk say that only the best go to war. That’s true, but the best of the best are most likely to come home. Well, it’s no so bad as it might be; you left some here and dispatched others back, with the loot. You will soon be in the field again, with luck,—I was with Montrose, Douglas, Dalziel, the Napiers and Erskine. With about thirty troopers we cut our way through and rode like the hammers of hell for Traquair where the bastard closed the gates on us. The best thing he could have done, for had we been admitted, they would no doubt have overtaken us and captured the Marquis.

“Fording the Clyde the following day, we ran into old Airlie—you cannot kill that ancient paladin—and Crawford. Montrose has ridden north with them to raise the clans. This time he will stay in the hills, I trust. So you see, it’s no so bad, laddie. After all, we lost few Highlanders due to their miserliness and the loyal Lowlanders were

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not worth their salt any way. It's only the Ulster-men that I mourn,—them, we cannot replace—but send out for your men. I have news that calls for them."

"But, Ranald," I cried, "we are not fit and far too few. We cannot go out now!"

"Listen, laddie, you're not going out yet, you may never go out again. Mactavish is on his way here with forty Horse at his back to take you."

We took the news in stunned silence—the blow had fallen at last.

"Then," Dougal said, "you must awa' to the hills, Sannoch. I'll go prepare."

"Hold," said Ranald, "how about the tower and the village, are you going to leave that to their tender mercy?"

"What can we do?" asked Dougal. "There is no one in the place, but we, young Colin, his father and a couple of gillies and lassies. We canna hold the place with sic, all the rest are in their crofts on the hills or in the village. The last we can get in, if there be time enough, but at that we muster less than a dozen."

Ranald paced the floor. "There's a way," he said, "and we must try it. I have been planning it all the way over here; this villain must not escape again."

I thought him mad—well I knew his indomitable

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spirit—but that he could entertain the hope of another victory in the face of such odds was too much for me.

“How long have we?” asked Dougal anxiously.

“Oh, enough time to get the villagers—send off your gillies to warn them. Best leave the village to its fate and send the women and children to the hills. But bid the men be here within the hour.”

Dougal went off and Ranald waved a question of mine aside and continued to stare in the fire thinking his own thoughts until the giant returned.

“Dougal, does the portcullis work?”

“Oh, aye, this twa year, sin’ I put it in repair just before your coming, though the laird here thought it nonsense.”

“Does it work easily?”

“Aye, I cleared the tracks, replaced the old chains and greased them regularly; ’twill fall of its own weight with the chucks removed.”

“Good! Your fortune may depend upon this nonsense of Dougal’s, cousin—where does it operate from?”

“From the laird’s room above the door.”

“Let us look at it.”

We mounted the stairs to my room and looked at the ancient portcullis, a huge iron grill which was hoisted out of sight into a cleft in the low ceiling. Often I had cursed it because it sometimes

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made the room draughty. Stepping close one could see the doorstep and shallow passage to it through the portcullis channel in the floor.

Ranald stepped back, and turned to me.

“Cousin, are you ready for one desperate cast—the last one for your all? Win, you win all, lose, you are lost indeed.”

“Will my people be any the worse if I take it?”

“No, for they stand or fall with you; your gain is their gain.”

“Yes,” I answered, “I am ready for anything so long as they sacrifice no more by it.”

He turned back to Dougal. “Get a stout rope and fasten it through the falls to the portcullis, so that the other end can be fastened to this bed. Then unfasten the chains so that its weight is held solely by the rope.

“Mactavish is at Aberfeldy, or was. He stopped to rest his troops and will plan to get here before dawn. 'Tis luck I cast a shoe outside the town for otherwise I would have run into their arms. But he had sent for the smith to come in and look after their mounts, from which labour he had just returned, when I got to his forge. And he slipped me the news, so that I rode around and came on as fast as I could. We should still have three or four hours.

“When they get here, my plan is to place some

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of the men below in the buttery and others on the stairs so as to take them on all sides. Let a light or two gleam dimly in upper windows and leave one or two likewise in the village so it will not have a deserted look. They will no doubt pass it by until they are finished here. When they demand entrance, let old Colin go to the door and on demand open it. I make no doubt that amongst the first to rush in will be Mactavish. Dougal will stand by the rope up here with his axe and when I see Mactavish well in, I will blow your horn. That is his signal to cut the rope and bring our men forth. Those inside will be caught like rats in a trap, and you, old friend," sticking a finger in Dougal's ribs, "as soon as you cut the rope don't fail to set the chucks so that it cannot be raised, before you come to the baiting.

"No doubt some will be killed before they throw down their arms, but make sure that all are not, for to save the village from another burning, it will be necessary to hold hostages. It's all clear, is it not?"

"Mon, dear," cried Dougal, "'tis beautiful, and 'twill work."

"One thing I insist on—"

"I know, Sannoch, you want Mactavish for your own. Well, you shall have him—mind that, Dougal. I will cut down any man that touches him

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until Sannoch is through with him or down—after that he is mine and he will not leave here except as a corpse.”

Rory came in from the village as blithe as if to a wedding, having already heard the plan from Colin, who had sped off for him, and one by one, the plan was retold as the others gathered, until we mustered fourteen with the two Selkirk men who had decided to stay on.

When the portcullis was adjusted, we all repaired to the old hall where the spirits were passed around and the fire refreshed while Ranald told us all he had gathered of the aftermath of Philiphaugh—how the Covenant celebrated their first victory in a welter of blood. The last of the Irish on the field had surrendered on promise of quarter; but the ministers insisted that ‘the Lord’s work go on.’ Three hundred Irish women and children, the miserable but faithful camp followers who had marched backwards and forwards across Scotland, were butchered on the field. And the following day the Ulstermen who had surrendered were cut down to a man in the courtyard of Newark Castle.

Their leader, the gallant O’Cahan, was spared for the moment, but only to meet a shameful death later in the city of Edinburgh.

My little band sat about on the flags of the hall drinking their toddy and listening to the dreadful

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news, but so inspiring was Ranald's presence that no one seemed to think of the long chance before us. It was as if they confidently considered the *coup* as good as won. Until Ranald, sensing the lateness of the hour, put an end to the drinking and ordered each man to his post.

Time went on, the fire burned down to a few smouldering coals which glowed in the blackness. Then in the distance we heard a dog bark. In a moment it was taken up by a dozen, so unused were they to nocturnal disturbances. We heard the clatter of hoofs on the road, followed by a jingle of equipment as they turned off on the soft turf towards the tower. There was a hoarse command to halt, much stamping of feet followed by a thunderous knocking on the door.

“Open in the name of the Covenant!”

Dougal had sped to his post, and Ranald and I mounted the stairs to a turn where we could see well to the door without disclosing ourselves. Old Colin opened his lanthorn, the better for us to see when our man was in the trap, and shuffled to the door while Ben, locked in the kitchen out of harm's way, roared his protest.

Colin fumbled with the peep—“What do you want?” he quavered as if frightened out of his wits.

“Come on! Open the door. We want the Laird of Sannoch, and have an order for his arrest.”

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"He's no here whatever; he's no hame frae the wars."

"He isn't, eh? Will you open up—you old fool! We'll see for ourselves and crack your pate in the bargain if we have to beat in the door. Open, I say!"

The old man fumbled with the bolts and bars and as it gave way, the door was flung back upon him and they poured in. A sergeant and four troopers first—then Mactavish followed by others pressing on his heels. They strode into the room—would Ranald never blow? I was ready to shriek a command when the blast came. They stopped in their tracks and with a crash that shook the place, the portcullis fell, pinning a soldier under its points. Out our men rushed from the buttery as we came down the stairs followed by Dougal. There were more of them within than I had counted on, but Ranald had chanced that to get Mactavish well inside before he gave the signal. Nevertheless, the element of surprise was on our side as well as better men.

One look Mactavish had given towards the portcullis and no sooner had I reached the floor of the hall than he saw me and rushed in, swinging a terrific blow with his broadsword that all but beat down my guard. In the open with room to manœuvre, I verily believe that I could have bested

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him, but there in the dimly lighted hall, jostled by others, and never knowing when a blow would be struck from behind, there was no chance to use my point. It was a case of cut, guard, and riposte.

Meanwhile the fight was going forward about us and Mactavish was forced to give ground with his men to avoid exposing his flank. Ranald kept out of the mêlée, a watchful eye upon us. Dougal's axe and Colin and Rory with their swords had each disposed of their man while Red Wallace was dirking one under the table. Mactavish made another cut at me which I ducked and coming in close with my lighter weapon, presented the point and forced him to spring to the rear. Dougal disposed of another and Ranald coolly shot down a man who sought to get behind me. Then, as I pressed the fight to my enemy, someone lurched against me throwing me off balance. Quick as a panther Mactavish took the advantage and swung a two-hander at my left shoulder. I caught it on my blade but it was the weak side and I was off balance. The mighty claymore beat down my guard and bit deep into my shoulder.

As I staggered from the blow Ranald engaged him and someone drew me to the rear. Meanwhile the Covenanters were crying for quarter and Mactavish sprang back and put the table between him and his foe.

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Midst the groans of the wounded, I was dimly conscious for the first time of the thunderous attack on the portcullis from without and I sank back, sick with weakness, against the wall.

"Lights!" cried Ranald. "Pay no attention to that rabble without. They can do nothing for the moment."

Someone threw some brush upon the fire and as it flared up, I had a good look at Mactavish standing behind the table. His face was white with passion and any moment I expected to see him throw himself on us all and go down fighting.

"Watch him!" Ranald said, reading his thoughts, "if he makes a move, Colin, blow his brains out. Meanwhile, the rest of you bind these fellows and take them to the battlement where their barking friends may see them." The task was soon done and tightly bound, they were herded up the narrow stairs.

"Mactavish," he said after a bit and we all waited breathlessly upon his words, "you have failed again. Dougal is showing our hostages from the battlement and telling the balance of your bastardly psalm-singing rabble that they have five minutes to start from the glen or the nine of them will swing, one a minute from the walls. You're an evil man, Mactavish, but I think you have cooked your last devil's broth and are about to

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stew in it. You deserve to die and I think you will, but you have just one chance for your life. I swear by my knife, as Sannoch will, that if you best me in fair fight here and now that no other hand will touch you till you leave this glen. I don't think you will, but it's your only chance."

Mactavish had never taken his eye from Ranald during his speech, never once did he look towards me.

"Do you accept?"

"Aye."

"Then come out, you swine, and start for hell."

He stepped from behind the table, balanced squarely on both feet, the great broadsword grasped in both hands. Ranald was lightly poised to meet him, his cut and thrust sword extended. For a moment they opposed each other so; there was not a sound in the room save the crackle of the fire on the hearth.

Then suddenly Mactavish sprang like a cat. Ranald met the vicious stroke with the strength of his blade, close to the guard. Retreating rapidly as Mactavish followed up his attack with a cut to the neck, he ducked and stretched out in a lightning-like riposte that brought the burly Highlander up short.

Mactavish changed his tactics: he fenced with one hand, but braced his swings when they came,

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backing up his strokes by grasping his right wrist with his left hand. Feinting for his face, his arm, his leg with lightning-like riposte, Ranald slowly retreated across the hall, then suddenly engaged the villain's blade and coming in close with a bind, changed position with him so that he again had the length of the room at his back. Mactavish rushed as he turned and a stop thrust took him in the shoulder.

"That's for David," hissed Ranald.

Mactavish rushed again with a terrific cut, Ranald took it in carte partly retreating by bending his body back, and like a viper, his blade shot forward. Certain of his point, he extended in a full lunge. I heard the hilt thud against Mactavish's doublet as the blade glistened between his shoulder, and then as Ranald whipped it out, the broadsword clattered to the floor and without another sound Mactavish fell forward on his face and lay quite still.

Everything went black before me, there was a roaring in my ears and a great swirling light and I was falling, falling—

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I seemed to be in a dream; for a long time I had been dimly conscious of luxurious ease and peace, drifting eternally through space, administered to

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by loving hands. Slowly the dream changed and I knew that I was not in the clouds, but abed. I heard voices vaguely familiar, but I did not want to awaken and have to know them. I wanted peace —that was it, peace and quiet.

For ages I had been struggling with horrid beasts, sometimes I knew they were not real and they went away, but always to return. There was one, a slithering obscene thing that crawled after me to envelop me in its toils. We would grapple and I would stab and stab, but all to no avail; for my puny sword would bend like a wand and the beast would laugh and when it laughed I would see that it had the face of Mactavish. I would run and run over a sea of white upturned faces, trying not to tread upon their poor, groaning mouths.

Now that was all over—and the clouds swept me on—an angel lifted me up and held me to her bosom and I smiled.

“My love,” she said and her voice was like the soft ripple of the wind in the birches, “my own true love.”

“You look like Ellen,” I whispered and my voice surprised me, it seemed so far away.

“I am Ellen,” she replied, and I knew that the peace was true and with a sigh of happiness, I went off to sleep and the beast came back no more.

Little by little I regained my strength and some

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days later, when I was able to ask intelligent questions, she told me how Ranald had sent for her. Carrying the badge she had given me, Colin and Rory had traversed the Campbell country without molestation and brought her to me with a guard of Campbell followers who had peaceably resided with us ever since.

She told me how Ranald and Dougal had sat by my cot day and night holding me down during my raving until she got there and that when she spoke to me, the beast would go away. Then Ranald had ridden into the north to rejoin Montrose.

When I voiced my fears for reprisals on the glen, she laughed and told me not to fear so long as she was there with her Campbell men.

“And you won’t leave me ever?” I queried anxiously.

“Nay, laddie, I am here to stay. Father Shamus will marry us as soon as you are strong.”

“Your father,” I queried, “what of him?”

“I pray he will pardon us,—I think he will in time. He is proud of his daughter and knows that I have a will of my own.”

“I’m proud of her too,” I whispered drawing her down on the bed and smothering her with kisses.

“Lord,” she gasped in mock terror, “if you’re as strong as that Father Shamus better be quick about

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his wedding." And shaking an admonishing finger at me, she left me—and I heard the happy voice of her in song as she tripped off below to get the food she stuffed me with, to bring back the blood which Mactavish had let out.

When I found that it was two months since I had lost consciousness, I was appalled. Another month went by and we were well into December before I was able to sit by the fire in the old hall, wrapped in a plaid where I talked to Colin and Rory of our adventures and of what went forward in the north.

News came to us fitfully: we heard how the Marquis gathered another little Highland army and waited on the dallying Gordons until he gave them up in despair for good and all and turned south to join Digby who at long last started for the Border. But Digby was doomed never to meet him and after his disastrous defeat there was little left for the Marquis to do but return to the hills with his army of fifteen hundred foot, mostly the ever faithful Farquharsons and Atholl men, and some three hundred cavalry which Ogilvy had raised. When Christmas came, word reached us that he was back on the Speyside still dickering with Huntly, and carrying on a partly successful guerrilla war. We hoped that Ranald would come to us, but he was far too busy.

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So we were married in the old hall on Christmas Day, midst the acclaim of the clansmen of San-noch and their hereditary enemies, the Campbell men of Ellen's sept, thereby affording them a double excuse for celebration. I feared the effect of too much wassail on their fiery temperaments and bade Dougal keep a sharp eye on them, but he laughed it off. "For," said he, "they cannot fight with their own in-laws, and three of our widows are already promised to Campbell men." So were the Glens restocked on more than one occasion and what better way to discourage feuds and refresh the blood which all too often needed it badly?

We were not molested from the outside, whether or not Ardchatten staved off Covenant reprisal there was no telling, but our lonely glen was far removed and no doubt the drubbing they had received was sufficiently discouraging. Word came of the siege of Inverness which was relieved by Middleton, forcing Montrose to retreat into Ross and then we heard no more until spring when Ranald came trotting up to the door, with his welcome hail—"Hello, within!"

A little leaner and more weatherbeaten, his fine French coat with the silver buttons on its great cuffs threadbare, and his boots down at heel, but his steel back and breast and the lobster casque upon his head were still burnished bright as silver and

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his long sword cocked up behind as bravely as ever.

The tumultuous welcome over, we sat down to hear his news, whereupon he asked me to send out for the men to come in.

"Not that I would drag them out, laddie," he said hastily noting my look of alarm. "That is all over now, but only that I may bid them good-bye before I go."

"Must you speak of going, when you have but just arrived?"

"Aye," he replied, "I must away in the morning. I but came to bring you news that will be welcome. It's all over, the King has given up the fight and bidden his Viceroy lay down his arms, quit Scotland, and wait on his further orders in France. Middleton made generous terms. A free pardon is granted to all, saving the Viceroy himself, Sir John Hurry, and Crawford. These three are banished from Scotland and their estates forfeit. All others are to be restored. Sannoch is to have peace at last."

"Why stay you not with us?" asked Ellen.

But he shook his head. "Nay," he said, "I have hitched myself to the tail of Montrose's cart and I shall follow his fortunes to the end. The time is not yet for me to settle down, but it is nice to know that I have a place to come to. Hold you the

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lands of Mactavish, by right of conquest, Sannoch, against my return. Methinks I have earned a share in them."

Early on the morrow his horse was led to the door, low he bent over Ellen's hand, and then to hide his feelings, caught her to him and roundly kissed her. His eyes were very bright indeed when he grasped me by the shoulders and gently shook me.

"Tell me, Sannoch, was I no a good prophet?" glancing from Ellen to me. "It's only the bairns you need, to be scared off to bed with tales of bad uncle Ranald."

With that he swung himself into the saddle and turning, rode off across the lawn, nor did he once look back as he disappeared in the trees.

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brae—A hillside.

burn—A turbulent mountain brook.

caper—An abbreviation of the name of the capercally, or capercailzie, the largest of the grouse family; a bird common to the woods in the Highlands. “Strutting like a caper” has reference to the proud mating demonstration of the cock bird.

claymore—Gaelic *Claidheamb-mor*, the great sword of the Highland warrior, commonly confused with the present basket-hilted broadsword as worn with Highland regalia and by officers of the Scottish regiments. The original claymores were two-handed weapons, with a broad, thin blade about four feet six inches in length. The hilt was usually of wood and fitted with two flat guards which slanted towards the point, frequently ending in a trefoil design of Gothic origin. The claymore was similar to the two-handed knight’s sword of the fourteenth century and was so long over all that it was usually carried over the shoulder without a scabbard.

corrie—A cup-like mountain recess.

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croft—A small holding of rented land.

dale—A broad, lowland valley.

Fianna—The Gaelic Sagas of Ireland, being principally devoted to the prowess of the chiefs and their clans in battle and from which we glean much that we know today of the dim history of the celts.

gillie or *ghillie*—Male servant or henchman; a baggage carrier, messenger, groom, or more commonly, a sporting attendant.

gillie-mhor—The chieftain's sword-bearer, the nearest or most important attendant to the laird.

glen—A deep narrow valley.

gralloch—The bleeding and cleaning of a fallen stag.

Highland pistols—The pistol of Scotland was of unique design, the entire weapon being made of steel, even to the butt, which was usually finished with a ram's horn design. The all-metal construction was influenced by the habit in battle of rushing upon the enemy and firing the pistols into their ranks at short range, then using the weapon as an additional missile and hurling it at their heads before falling upon them with sword and axe.

Hold—The Hold, or tower, of Scotland is much the same as the inner keep of the more elaborate English and European castles, without the surrounding moat and bastioned walls. They are still common and many of them such as Castle Menzies, Lennoxlove, near Haddington, are good examples, still inhabited. Invariably they are square, with a short wing, in some instances. Usually the external meas-

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urements are about eighty to ninety feet and the walls from eight to ten feet thick. There is only one entrance, usually just of sufficient height and breadth to admit a horse, so that only one could attack at a time if the ponderous door were battered in. The tower is usually four to five stories in height, surmounted by a shallow battlement, with small flaring turrets jutting out of the upper storey. In the centre of the flat-roofed battlement usually rises a peaked roofed centre portion set back from the outer wall and rising to another storey in height. The ceiling of the ground floor is usually some twenty feet in height and the windows but tiny loopholes set high in the sides. The windows in the rooms above are small so as to prevent egress. The upper floors are divided into store-rooms and living quarters of the household. The Great Hall, or main room on the ground floor, was the general living room of the tower and was used in time of need as a sanctuary for the peasants' cattle.

kern or *kerne*—A Celtic peasant; a soldier; a feudal retainer of the lower stratum of society.

kilt—For a better understanding of this garment it should be understood that the kilt of the Highlander was very different from the garment used today. It was not sewed, but was wrapped about the body in pleated folds, held in position by a broad belt. It came up close to the armpits and the loose end was thrown over the shoulder and clasped to the breast with a brooch to hold it in place. This

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loose end could be drawn about the wearer like a cloak. With it and the accompanying saffron shirt, were worn a bonnet and brogues.

leine-chrion—Literally, “shirt of mail,” a term used to describe the personal guard of the chief; those selected to stand by him in battle.

Lochaber axe—A weapon popular with the Western Clans as late as Culloden. The halve was a straight shaft some four feet long and the blade was broad, usually some sixteen inches from top to bottom on the edge. Generally, it was furnished with a short hook at the upper end, like the bill-hooks of the earlier pole axes of the thirteenth century.

marches—The boundary of private lands, counties and even the Border between England and Scotland. The principle Border nobles were known as the Wardens of the Marches.

Peel tower—See HOLD.

pibroc or *pibroch*—The martial music of the bag-pipes.

plaid—An oblong woollen cloth of tartan used as a cloak or outer garment. It is often confused with the kilt, because in the early days the two were not divided but worn as one. The long plaid was wound about the body from the armpits down, the upper end was thrown over the shoulder to act as a cloak and was held in place by a large brooch, the lower portion hanging loosely to the knees, forming the kilt proper, which was held in place by a belt. (See *kilt*.)

saffron shirt—The Highland costume consisted of but

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two garments, a short-sleeved, long skirted shirt and the tartan kilt of checked cloth. The shirt was made of native wool and dyed with the juices of lichens which gave it a yellow colour.

sassenach—An outlander, more particularly, an Englishman.

sgian dbu or *skein dhub*—Literally, *black knife*. The short-bladed dirk usually worn tucked in the right stocking at the knee by the kilted Highlander. It was a personal weapon which was never set aside, even in the house of a friend.

sporran—A leather purse worn on the front of the kilt, taking the place of pockets.

strath—A broad Highland valley.

tarn—A small mountain lake.

targe or *target*—The Highland shield, used in conjunction with the broadsword or claymore. The targe is a round shield usually about twenty-four inches in diameter, made of oak and covered with bull's hide and studded with brass or iron nails, usually with a short spike in the centre.

tartan—A kind of woollen cloth wove from various brightly coloured yarns, from which the kilt and plaid are made. Each of the principal clans has its distinguishing pattern of which they are very proud and by which the members of the clan are easily known.

Tolbooth—An ancient prison in the old city of Edinburgh. So to speak, the Bastille of Scotland, where many political prisoners languished.

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